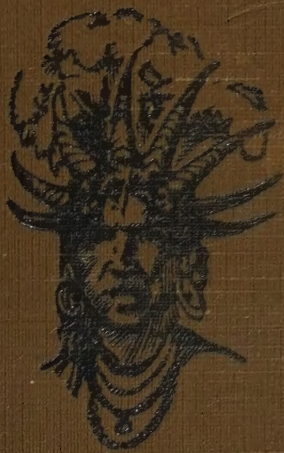


THE **SECRET** OF THE
GOLDEN IDOL



J. G. ROWE

Walter Frick Jr

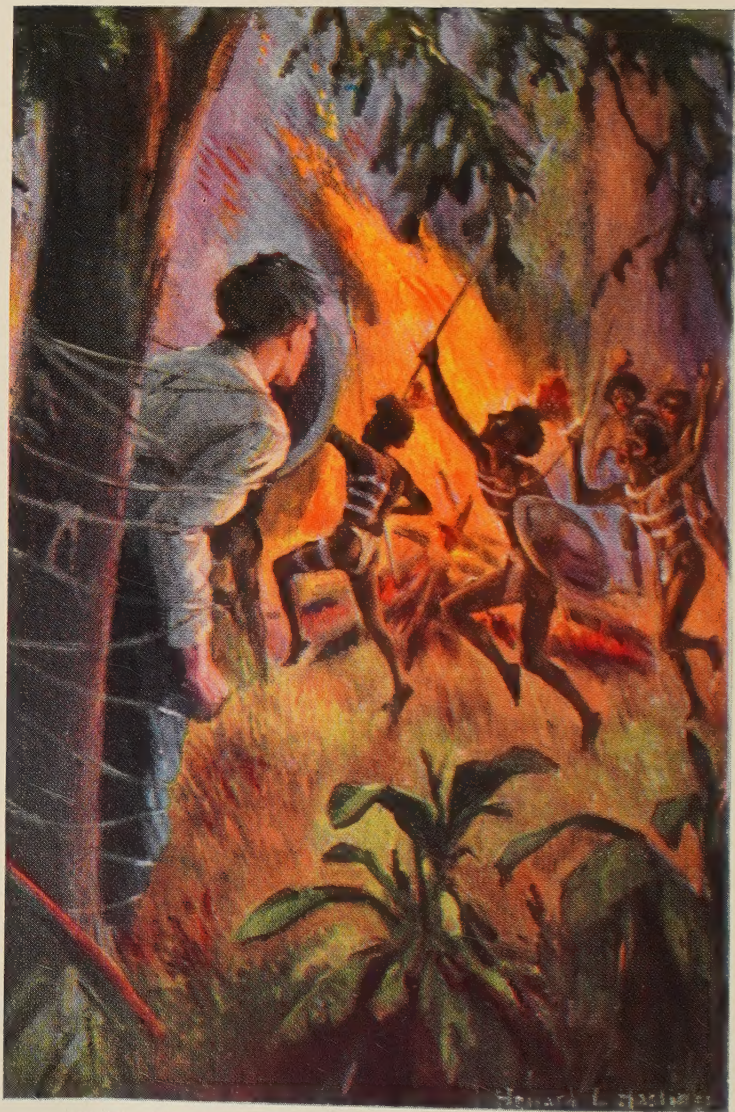
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THEN SUDDENLY, ONE LET OUT A FRIGHTFUL YELL
"Secret of the Golden Idol"

Page 64

The SECRET *of the* GOLDEN IDOL

A Story of the Thrilling Adventures
of Two American Boys on
Tropical Islands.

By JOHN G. ROWE

AUTHOR OF "CRUSOE ISLAND," "THE ISLAND TREASURE,"
"THE MYSTERY OF THE DERELICT," ETC.

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

SEA STORIES FOR BOYS

By JOHN G. ROWE

Large 12 mo. Illustrated. Jacket in Full Colors.

CRUSOE ISLAND

THE ISLAND TREASURE

THE MYSTERY OF THE DERELICT

THE SECRET OF THE GOLDEN IDOL

THE LIGHTSHIP PIRATES

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, New York

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THE SECRET OF THE GOLDEN IDOL

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ROUGH MAP, SKETCHED BY ME, RICHARD SELWYN, OF THE TOP OF TOWER ROCK

THE SECRET OF THE GOLDEN IDOL

CHAPTER I

THE MUTINY

THE tight little trading schooner *Albatross* lay becalmed off the north coast of New Guinea. There was not a breath of air stirring, and her sails hung limp and motionless from the yards.

A blazing sun beat down mercilessly upon the deck, scintillating in a myriad rays of dazzling light from the well-polished brasswork. Most of the crew were dozing in shady nooks and corners; for the vessel had been becalmed over three days, and there was nothing to do.

In the shadow of the longboat two men were conversing in low but earnest tones, occasionally casting furtive glances around them, as though they were afraid of being overheard.

One was the second mate, James Carker, a burly, coarse-featured man, with steely blue eyes that never looked one straight in the face, and thin lips that closed tightly over the whitest and smallest of teeth.

The other was a Peruvian seaman named Miguel Alvarez, who was, if anything, even less prepossessing, with his long, curling, coal-black hair, thick, shaggy eyebrows and beard, and the rings in his ears.

"You say you have won all the men over except three, Alvarez?"

"Si, all except Mason, Perks, and Smith. I was afraid to approach dem in de matter, as I think dem not likely to join us."

"You were quite right, then, not to hint anything to them. It doesn't do to run risks in an affair of this kind. Well, I see no reason why we shouldn't strike at once and get it over. Captain Somers and Drew are both lying down in their cabins. It seems to me a favorable opportunity. We may never get such another again. With any luck we ought to be able to settle them now without any fuss whatever."

"Ees; but what of de two boys? Where are dey?"

"Oh, I saw Merritt in their 'house' a minute ago, and probably Selwyn is with him now. Quick, do you go forward and bring the men aft, in case there is trouble. I'll slip down to the cabin, and, if I get a chance, make sure of the skipper."

The pair separated, and, as they walked away, a boy's white, horrified face looked over the side of the longboat.

"Mutiny!" he gasped. "Good heavens!"

He scrambled upright in the boat, a fine specimen of the manly American lad, of about eighteen, clad in

the blue, "brass bound" uniform of an apprentice or mercantile cadet.

He had stowed himself away in the bottom of the boat, under the tarpaulin, upon the coils of spare cordage kept there, so as to hide from his chum and brother-apprentice, Tom Merritt, who, he knew, would be considerably puzzled to know where he had got to.

Thus he had been an unintentional eavesdropper—had overheard, with feelings that can be better imagined than described, the whole of the foregoing conversation between the second mate and Alvarez.

That the pair were the ringleaders in a desperate plot that was afoot to seize the schooner, and murder the captain and first mate, he could not doubt, with their terribly significant dialogue still ringing in his ears.

Quickly reaching up, he caught the davits just above him, swung himself nimbly on to the bulwarks, then dropped to the deck and started hot-foot after the second mate.

That individual had just got to the top of the companion. Another minute and he had disappeared down it.

With his heart in his mouth, Dick Selwyn, for such was the name of the apprentice, tore to the hatch and sprang down the stairs into the main saloon in a couple of bounds.

The door of Captain Somers's stateroom, on the starboard side, was wide open, and the boy stood rooted

to the spot with momentary horror at the tableau before him.

Carker was bending over the skipper, who lay fast asleep in his bunk, with a gleaming knife upraised, about to plunge it into his heart.

At the noise of the lad's entry, however, the would-be assassin turned with a startled cry, that woke Captain Somers.

The skipper started up in surprise. But before either he or Dick Selwyn could make a move or utter a sound, the villainous second mate whirled round again, and, quick as lightning, drove the knife up to the haft in his breast.

With a scream that was choked by a rush of blood from his mouth and nostrils, the hapless skipper fell back in the bunk a corpse.

Instantly, with a shriek of horror that rang from end to end of the ship, Dick Selwyn rushed into the state-room and flung himself upon the murderer, grappling wildly with him, pommeling him frenziedly in the face and ribs with his clenched fists. Locked together, they reeled backwards and forwards in the confined space, the mate, cursing and swearing horribly, striving to stab his youthful antagonist. But his knife came in contact with the hanging cabin lamp, shattering this.

The broken pieces of glass fell in a shower upon his head, cutting it badly in one or two places. The apprentice, with his head almost pillowed upon his foe's breast, escaped the shower unhurt. And the next

second he had twined his legs around the latter's and tripped him up.

Down they both crashed heavily, Carker undermost, just as Mr. Drew, the chief mate, rushed in, clad only in his shirt and trousers, as he had been lying down. At the same time there came a fierce hubbub of shouts and piercing screams on deck, followed by the scuffling and rush of feet.

In his fall Dick Selwyn was so unlucky as to knock his head rather severely against the side of the captain's bunk. His hold upon his foe relaxed, and the scoundrel in a moment had flung him off and bounded upright.

Dashing at Drew, before that officer could recover from his horrified amaze and grasp the situation, Carker gave him a slash across the left side of the head with the knife, then, as he staggered back, rushed out of the cabin.

The miscreant, however, was not to get away scatheless.

In the passage at the foot of the companion-way he collided violently with Tom Merritt, Dick's brother-apprentice, who was flying for his life from the mutineers on deck.

Both fell, but, fortunately perhaps for Merritt, they rolled either way. With a string of oaths, Carker scrambled to his feet and tore towards the ladder.

He was bounding up this when Mr. Drew appeared

behind him, in the saloon doorway, gripping a revolver. Promptly the chief mate aimed and fired at him.

The bullet sped true, striking him in the left arm, even as his foot was on the top step. He fell forward upon his hands and knees, and two or three seamen darted into the open doorway of the hatch and dragged him hastily out of sight.

Then, with a wild shout, a swarm of men surged in at the opening and came leaping down the stairs, flourishing knives, pistols and iron bars.

Drew needed no telling they were more mutineers. Murder was writ upon their faces—gleamed in their eyes.

He immediately pointed his revolver upward again and opened a deadly fusilade upon them.

Two of the bloodthirsty mob, shot through the body, fell headlong down the ladder. Another, badly wounded, only saved himself from following them by clinging to the rail.

There was instantly a stampede for the deck again by the rest. And, profiting by this, Mr. Drew and Tom Merritt got inside the saloon door, which they shut and locked.

They were joined by Dick Selwyn, who brought two revolvers he had found in the captain's stateroom. One of these he gave Tom Merritt, retaining the other himself.

Mr. Drew hastily reloaded his discharged chambers, and then Dick bound a handkerchief round his head to

stop the flow of blood from the ugly wound Carker had given him.

The boy was engaged in this task, when a dark shadow was thrown across the saloon skylight, and a bullet smashed through the glass and imbedded itself in the floor at their feet.

Immediately Tom Merritt, raising his revolver, fired two shots in rapid succession through the skylight. There was a volley of oaths and the scrambling of feet, as the mutineers outside precipitately retreated.

After this there was a short pause, and Mr. Drew, who, happily, was feeling but little weakness from his injury, made hasty preparations for a vigorous defense of the cabin. Dick Selwyn now, for the first time, had an opportunity of telling him how many of the crew were concerned in the mutiny.

It was more than likely that the three honest sailors, Mason, Smith, and Perks, had already fallen victims to the fury of the mutineers, or else they had thrown in their lot with these, overawed by numbers. They could not have barricaded themselves inside the fore-castle or anywhere for unarmed as they were, they would have been very quickly overpowered.

"With the exception of the cabin, therefore, the mutineers are masters of the vessel," groaned Mr. Drew. "But keep a brave heart, boys," he added, "I do not believe they have more than a couple of revolvers at most amongst them, while we possess the captain's stock of firearms and ammunition. With

them we ought to be able to render a good account of ourselves, though how long we shall be able to keep the villains at bay, it will be difficult to say."

At Mr. Drew's direction, Dick Selwyn watched the skylights, holding his revolver cocked, in readiness to fire at the first form or shadow that showed itself above them on the deck. He stood in such a manner as to command the windows without unduly exposing himself.

Tom Merritt kept guard over the door leading into the alleyway at the foot of the companionway, while the chief mate, taking advantage of the lull, proceeded to pile the few articles of movable furniture in the saloon and the chests from the adjoining staterooms against the door.

CHAPTER II

THE DEFENSE OF THE CABIN

THE three defenders of the cabin were not long left in undisturbed possession of it.

Before Mr. Drew had quite finished barricading the door, there came a sudden rush of feet down the companion stairs, and at the same time the skylights overhead were shattered to atoms by a shower of all sorts of missiles—handspikes, belaying-pins, and blocks.

These fell thickly, with the pieces of broken glass, around the besieged trio, who, however, undauntedly replied to the attack by firing briskly with their revolvers in either direction. Drew pounded away through the door, which was shaking and quivering under the thundering blows of axes and adzes, while the two lads fired right and left in rapid succession up through the broken skylights.

The hail of missiles from the deck above ceased, and the rascals attempting to beat in the door retreated up the stairs.

Dick and Tom could not forbear cheering at this partial success; and Mr. Drew said, as they hastily reloaded their weapons:

“Boys, you are heroes, both of you. I am proud to have you beside me. You are worth the whole of that

scum outside. What do you say—shall we try the offensive now? I do believe if we got on deck we could overawe the whole lot—cow them into laying down their weapons and submitting.”

“I am with you, sir, whatever you decide on doing,” Dick Selwyn at once replied, keeping his eye warily on the broken skylight.

“And I, sir!” added Tom Merritt, rather tremulously, however.

“Brave lads! Very well, then we’ll first take a peep through the skylight and see what the villains are doing. Keep your ears open, boys, for any one approaching the door.”

So saying, he clambered quickly on to the table, and, raising himself on tiptoe, cautiously attempted a reconnaissance. But on the instant a harpoon and a couple of knives, lashed to the ends of long sticks were thrust in at the skylight. And as he attempted to evade them, an ax, hurled full at his head, came flying through, narrowly missing braining him.

It crashed against the bulkhead behind him and fell to the floor between the horrified apprentices.

Drew jerked up his revolver smartly and fired out on to the deck. A yell of agony and a heavy fall told that the shot was not misspent.

“It was that German scoundrel, Wertzl. I have sure sent him to his account,” said Mr. Drew, as he leaped off the table. “It’s no use, lads, thinking of trying the offensive. There are half a dozen of them keeping

guard over the hatch—Carker and Alvarez with a revolver each, and the other with axes and handspikes. We shouldn't be able to get up the stairs, or, if we did, reckon it would only be to meet our deaths at the top. They could slaughter us before we could get a shot in."

"Then what do you propose doing, sir?" asked Tom Merritt, fearfully.

"I don't see that we can do anything beyond defending the cabin to the bitter end. That's the only thing we can do at present anyhow."

Dick Selwyn was about to make some suggestion, when a voice hailed them from the deck above.

"Drew—Drew! I want to parley with you."

"That's Carker's voice," said Dick.

Mr. Drew, advancing cautiously into the middle of the saloon, looked up through the skylight. He held his revolver ready in case of treachery.

"Stand farther back, or I'll shoot you down, you ruffian!" he shouted at some one he could see on the deck above.

"Hold hard!" answered the voice of Carker. "Look here, Drew, I want to know if we can't come to some amicable understanding. What do you say to joining us and becoming friends? It is no use your keeping up this useless fight. You will only throw your lives away to no purpose. We greatly outnumber you, and must prevail in the long run. If you join us, the truth need never leak out. We can easily account for the skipper's death by swearing he was washed overboard in a storm,

or something of that kind. If you'll consent to come out without more ado, and hand over the firearms, on the part of my comrades as well as myself I promise you your lives and liberties—more, we'll take you all three fully into our confidence, and let you into a secret that means a fortune for every one of us."

"What do you mean?" asked the chief mate.

"I'll put you wise. Alvarez, the Peruvian, knows of an island close hereabouts, where there is a most valuable treasure buried—a treasure that will make us all rich men if we can find it, and he assures me he knows of its site."

"What rot's this you are talking?"

"It isn't rot! Alvarez, during the last revolution in Peru, along with some score other bold spirits, looted the cathedral of Lima and carried off something like two million pounds' worth of plate, specie, and jewelry. It appears a number of the wealthy residents had turned the best part of their property into ready money and jewels, and entrusted these to the safe keeping of the priests. Alvarez and his friends captured the whole of the treasure, as well as the monastic plate—in itself, I believe, worth a vast sum. They conveyed their booty to a brig they had, and sailed with it right across the Pacific to this island I speak of, where they buried it. Then they made for Honolulu, intending to sell the brig and return in another vessel and bring away the treasure. But on the voyage they fell out amongst themselves, and Alvarez and two others were set adrift

by their companions in an open boat. Alvarez's two comrades perished of hunger and thirst, and he himself was almost at his last gasp when picked up by an American ship bound for Hong Kong. That, he says, was nearly three years ago, and five months back he met in Manila two of the rest of the band. They told him the brig foundered in a gale soon after he was cast adrift off the Marianne Islands, and that they alone escaped."

"Have you finished, Carker? Is that all?" asked Mr. Drew, sarcastically, as the other paused for want of breath. "And do you mean to say that you put any faith in such a cock-and-bull story as that? That"—in a tone of unutterable loathing and horror—"that you stirred up the crew to mutiny, and stained your soul with the blood of an innocent, unoffending old man—your own captain—so that you might test its truth?"

"It's no cock-and-bull story. It's truth, Gospel truth, every word of it, I am convinced," replied the mutineer, ignoring the last query. "Garcia and Diaz are the other survivors of the band, and they bear out Alvarez's statements in every particular."

"Humph! So that was your object in seizing the vessel and murdering poor Captain Somers? You wanted to go in search of this buried treasure?"

"Yes," snarled Carker. "Come, now, what do you say to my proposal to join us—you and the two lads? We will all share and share alike in the treasure and not a soul, as I said, need be any the wiser as to how

Captain Somers met his death. I'm sorry for him—that I killed him—but it's done now and can't be remedied. Well, what do you say, Drew?"

"This, you abominable scoundrel—that I would sooner meet death a hundred times than join you in your scheme after the way you have behaved. What, take your hand, and it still red with the innocent blood of poor Captain Somers! Out of my sight, you vile wretch, you dastardly, cold-blooded assassin, or I may be tempted to forget you have called a truce and execute justice on you where you stand."

"Oh, very well, then, you fool, your fate be on your own head. You have sure sealed your death warrant, as also that of those two confounded young swabs you have with you."

He turned as if to rejoin the other mutineers, who were gathered about the cabin hatch, but wheeled round again suddenly. His right arm went up with a quick jerk; there was a flash of fire and a sharp report.

Uttering a gasping cry, Mr. Drew staggered back, clasping one hand to his head, then fell in a collapsed heap upon the cabin floor.

Dick and Tom gave vent to simultaneous cries of horror, and forgetting their own safety in their deep concern for him, ran to him and tried to raise him.

But his head fell back limply, and one glance into his ashen-hued face, with the tiny bullet-wound—little larger than a pencil-mark—in the middle of the forehead, told them he was dead.

They let the body fall again with inarticulate, sob-like cries. And at the same moment there came the trampling of feet again on the companion-ladder outside, a rush into the alleyway, and then once more the crashing of axes on the door.

It gave way almost immediately, toppling over in its fall the frail barricade behind it. With exultant and vengeful yells the whole mob of mutineers poured into the cabin.

Dick Selwyn, frenzied by the cold-blooded murder of the first mate and the thought of what his own and his chum's fate would be, fired sharply into the thick of the invaders. A shriek told him the hasty shot had found a human billet. But the next instant the cut-throat crew, howling and cursing, had flung itself *en masse* upon the heroic lads, and they were both beaten to the floor, stunned and bleeding, beneath a shower of cruel blows.

So infuriated were the mutineers, who were a hybrid lot, of various nationalities and even colors—there were a negro, a Malay, and a Sandwich Islander among them, as well as a couple of South American half-breeds—at the brave resistance that had been made against them, they would have stabbed or beaten out the brains of their youthful prisoners, as these lay senseless and helpless at their feet, had not Carker interfered.

He was, we are proud to say, the only American amongst the gang, and he still had sufficient of his native

generous spirit left to be able to admire the lads' pluck and wish to save them.

"No, no; don't kill them, men," he cried. "Let the young fools live. We've about paid them out in full, sure, for the trouble they've given us, and we don't want their lives now we have effected our purpose. We'll give them a chance and put them ashore somewhere along the coast, or, better still, set them adrift, just as you were, Alvarez, in one of the boats, and let them shift for themselves."

"*Caramba!* No, not with my consent," fiercely exclaimed the Peruvian. "Dey may be picked up. Better cut their t'roats an' have done wit' dem, I say."

"*Si, si.* [Yes, yes.] Knife dem an' throw their bodies overboard. Dat de safest way to get rid of dem," growled Garcia, a mestizo, or half-caste, whose small, piercing black eyes, large, thin-lipped mouth, and remarkable length of body, as compared with his legs, denoted the large share of Indian blood in his veins.

"Ay, pitch them to the sharks! Dead men tell no tales," chimed in a big lantern-jawed Britisher, named Seth Pottle,

CHAPTER III

ADrift IN AN OPEN BOAT

IT looked as if the second mate would not be able to restrain his associates in crime from wreaking their bloodthirsty fury upon the helpless apprentices. And were he to persist in opposing them, they might turn upon and murder him too.

"Look here, men," he said, "I know what to do with them. Don't think for a minute I want them to escape death and get back safely to civilization, so as to blab about this day's work. I don't want to put my head in the noose or risk my neck, any more than you do. But to my thinking we have had quite enough blood spilt aboard this craft. Bloodshed's unlucky, as you know, and we don't want to be dogged by ill-luck. Set them adrift in a boat, with their hands tied, so that they cannot help themselves, and must be swamped in the first bit of a blow. That will ensure their never reaching a port, and yet we won't exactly have their blood on our hands."

This proposal was received with general acclamation by all except Alvarez and Garcia, who were still for pitching the lads immediately to the sharks, and grumbled at losing a boat over them. But there are none more superstitious than sailors, especially foreign sail-

ors, and what Carker had said had a deep effect upon the minds of most of the cutthroat crew.

The ruffians were now as eager to get rid of their prisoners without further bloodshed as they had been a moment before to slay them in cold blood. Alvarez's and Garcia's objection on the score of the boat was overruled, and the two apprentices were bound hand and foot with some strong cord.

Then, still unconscious and bleeding from their ill-usage, they were carried up on deck.

A boat—the dinghy—was quickly got out, when the lads were thrown in, atop of one another, and the painter cast off.

Slowly the boat drifted away from the *Albatross*, which was still lying becalmed, and the mutineers, without giving their boyish victims another thought, brought up the corpses of the captain and mate and flung them over the side. Then they proceeded to remove all other traces of the dreadful affray, boarding up the broken skylights and washing down the decks.

The boat was still in sight when a light breeze sprang up; and with shouts of satisfaction the mutineers clambered aloft to set every inch of canvas that would draw. Another minute or two, and the schooner was running swiftly before the wind towards the eastern horizon.

Dick Selwyn was the first of the two boys, thus so ruthlessly abandoned to their fate, to recover his senses.

He opened his eyes with an involuntary groan, but

they smarted so, he was fain to shut them again. His head and body ached frightfully; he felt faint and sick.

At length the pain he suffered grew less intense, and he opened his eyes again and glanced around.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked himself.

Then, as he remembered the terrible fight for life aboard the schooner and the cold-blooded murder of poor Mr. Drew, he shuddered and guessed what had occurred.

The mutineers had cast him and his fellow-apprentice adrift—left them to take their chance for life in an open boat on that most treacherous of all oceans—the Pacific.

Tom Merritt—was he still alive also? Or—oh, horrible thought!—had the fiends given him a corpse for a companion?

A groan the next moment from the lips of the bound form lying across his legs dispelled this fear, and satisfied him that his comrade still breathed at any rate.

Presently Tom moved, then, with another deep groan, opened *his* eyes, and asked faintly and wonderingly:

"Where—where am I?"

"With me, your chum, Dick Selwyn, old chap, in an open boat on the ocean. Those devils, the mutineers, cast us adrift. How are you feeling? Very bad? Are you much hurt, do you think?"

"I feel sore all over, my head is fairly splitting with pain, and I feel rather dizzy and faintish."

"You'll feel better after a bit. I don't think we got anything worse than hard knocks. Are any of your bones broken, do you think? I don't believe any of mine are; though, trussed as I am, I can hardly tell."

"No, I think all my bones are sound. But, oh, how my head does ache! I suppose I look a pretty picture. *You* do. There's blood clotted all over your head and face."

"It's just the same with you, old fellow."

"Is the schooner still in sight?"

"Just. She's hull down on the eastern horizon."

"The murderous cutthroats! To leave us bound and helpless like this in a cockleshell that must go to the bottom in the first blow of any size that comes along! I wish they hadn't tied these confounded cords so tightly. They cut into my ankles and wrists like knives, and my arms are numbed."

"I have an idea how we can free each other, Tom. Roll over upon your face in the bottom of the boat and I'll try my teeth on the ropes round your wrists."

"Splendid! The very thing!"

But it was not so very easy a matter thus to undo the tight knots. Dick's gums bled profusely as he bit and gnawed at the stout cords.

Again and again he had to desist. But it was practically a case of life or death and again and again he returned to the attack.

He persevered, although his mouth was running with blood and all his teeth ached, until at last he succeeded

in loosening, and finally untying, a couple of the knots; whereupon Tom was able to stretch the loops and slip his hands free of them.

Only waiting long enough then to rub his lacerated wrists and numbed arms in order to restore the circulation, Merritt whipped out his clasp-knife, which his captors had not relieved him of, and with it severed the cords upon Dick's wrists and ankles.

Both were now free and unfettered, and could, at any rate, make an effort for life if their frail craft should capsize—would not sink like stones.

They scrambled to their knees and gazed anxiously around them.

Look where they would, nothing broke the distant horizon. Only a dull monotony of sea and sky met their eyes on all sides.

They were alone upon the bosom of the broad and boundless Pacific hundreds of miles from the nearest spot of civilization, and without a bite to eat or a drop of water to quench their thirst, when the fierce pitiless sun of the tropics should blaze down upon them—adrift at the mercy of the winds and waves, without even oars to guide their frail craft into the track of vessels.

No wonder if their brave young hearts quailed for the minute, as they comprehended to the full the horror of their situation.

At the first squall that arose they must inevitably be swamped and sent to the bottom. Meanwhile, probably, they would suffer all the agonies of thirst and

hunger, completely exposed as they were to the burning rays of the sun.

Dick Selwyn who was Merritt's senior by a year, however, quickly recovered from his fit of despondency, and at once proceeded to try and cheer his companion.

"Let us not give way to despair," he said. "That will do no good. We must try and bear up, Tom, old fellow. Never say die! Come, we must make the best of a bad job. Look here, you see these three planks in the bottom of the boat? They are not at all necessary, and the smaller two 'ud make fairly decent oars, and that long piece a mast."

"So they would."

With very little trouble the lads wrenched away the three boards, without interfering with the boat's seaworthiness. Then they rigged up the largest one by tying it with the cords, which had so lately confined their wrists and ankles, to one of the thwarts.

They attached their jackets to it by the sleeves, so as to form a flag of distress and attract, if possible, the attention of any passing ship.

Next, with their clasp-knives—fortunately each had one—they proceeded to trim the smaller planks into rude oars, or rather paddles. Wrapping their handkerchiefs round the whittled ends to guard against splinters, they found the primitive implements served their purpose very well indeed.

The sun was setting while they were so occupied, and as there is no twilight in the tropics, night was now

upon them—night dark as Erebus, with not a star to be seen.

“Tom, you lie down and try and obtain some sleep. I’ll keep awake in case of a squall, or the possibility of a ship heaving in sight.”

But, worn out as he was in body and mind with all he had gone through, Dick’s intention was better than his deed. In spite of his efforts to keep awake, he was overpowered by drowsiness, and presently also dropped off fast asleep, sinking down gradually and easily into the bottom of the boat beside his chum.

There, cramped between the thwarts, with their heads deep sunk on their breasts, they both slumbered as peacefully as though in their comfortable bunks in the little ’prentice-house of the schooner.

And sweet dreams visited them, not the hideous nightmares that might have been expected under the circumstances—dreams of home and its loved ones, of that dear old land, those fond, kindly faces, they might never be fated to see again. They forgot in their sweet unconsciousness the awful scenes they had witnessed, the deeds of violence and blood, within the past few hours.

And the boat, scarcely rocking beneath them, rushed along swiftly but noiselessly through the night in the grip of a fast flowing current into which she had strayed.

CHAPTER IV

THE TROPICAL ISLAND

WITH the first peep of day Dick Selwyn awoke, feeling rather cold and stiff. He sat up and looked around him. Nothing but sea and sky met his gaze.

The breeze had fallen again, and their flag of distress flapped against the improvised mast with only the rolling of the boat.

Merritt was still sleeping, and Dick did not disturb him, being loth to rouse him from his temporary oblivion of their terrible predicament.

"Let him enjoy his unconsciousness of trouble and sorrow as long as he can," the noble youth murmured. "He will awake soon enough to the stern reality."

Dick soon became aware of the rapid motion of the boat, and his heart beat high with hope that the current would carry them across the track pursued by vessels trading between China and the west coast of America.

All too soon did he begin to feel the want of his breakfast; and, as the sun rose above the horizon and sent its scorching rays streaming across the waste of waters, an intolerable thirst also fastened upon him.

To try and shake off or forget the gnawing pangs, he drew his belt a hole tighter as he had read of the Red

Indians doing in like cases, and though there was no necessity, took up and plied the paddles.

Presently Tom awoke, and the youths exchanged salutations, which were naturally none of the cheeriest.

As the sun climbed higher and higher in the heavens his rays became perfectly unendurable, and the lads endeavored to shelter themselves by crouching under their coats, which they pulled off the mast and threw like hoods over their heads. Long before midday was reached both boys were consumed by a raging thirst, which in their weak and wounded condition momentarily threatened to bring on delirium.

From time to time they eagerly scanned the horizon in search of a friendly sail or wreath of smoke, but only to be disappointed. Nothing but sea and sky, sky and sea, did they see.

"Water, water everywhere; but not a drop to drink!" groaned Tom.

Sorely did the poor lads feel tempted to slake their awful thirst by drinking some of the sea water. "It would be madness to do so, old fellow," remonstrated Dick. "At best it would but increase our pangs. Hang on!"

They sought relief by occasionally bathing their faces, and holding their hands, plunged up to the elbows, in the water.

The heat was intense, and there was not the slightest breeze to mitigate it. On leaden wings the hours dragged by their weary length; and, to increase the

horror of the lads' situation, shoals of sharks now made their appearance all round the boat, following it with a terribly significant persistence.

The loathsome creatures seemed to know by instinct that the end of its occupants could not be far off. They eyed these, as they swam alongside, with wistful, hungry looks that made the latter's blood turn cold in their veins.

It was in vain the boys, who feared at first the ravenous monsters might upset their frail craft, frightened them off by making a great splashing and hulloing their loudest. They invariably returned, and, if anything, in greater numbers.

Night came at last, to the lads' ineffable relief. But neither could sleep at first for fear of the sharks for one thing, and with their sufferings from hunger and thirst for another.

It was almost as hot and stifling, too, as the day, and the boys lay gasping in the bottom of the boat, staring up in a dull, listless manner at the heavens, which were one blaze of liquid fire with stars.

Towards daybreak, however, both dropped off into a heavy sleep, from which neither awoke until long after the morrow's sunrise. Then it was Tom Merritt who first opened his eyes.

Scrambling to his knees to survey the horizon in quest of the longed-for sail, he beheld right ahead, and not more than a mile distant, a large, tropical island. "Land! land! hurrah!"



SHOALS OF SHARKS FOLLOWED THEM, WITH A TERRIBLY
SIGNIFICANT PERSISTENCE.

“Secret of the Golden Idol.”

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His shout awoke Dick, and the latter's delight at sight of the shore equaled his own. Weeping with joy they embraced each other.

Then, though the current was bearing them down rapidly upon the island, they must each seize a paddle and ply it frenziedly.

Both huzzaed wildly in their now exuberant spirits. Thirst, hunger, weakness—all were forgotten in the new-born excitement. For the nonce they were like madmen; they were really temporarily madmen—delirious with joy and hope.

The island presented a magnificent picture under the bright sunshine. Rocks, mountain peaks, deep ravines, and fertile valleys filled with luxuriant vegetation, were grouped together in the most charming manner, and the two apprentices felt a wild longing to be rambling through those shady groves, or rolling like young dogs or horses upon the rich greensward beneath their cool shade.

No fear that this earthly Paradise might be inhabited by fierce and blood-thirsty savages or wild beasts fortunately entered their enthusiastic hearts.

The current swept in at one side of a wide bay and out at the other, tearing along at the rate of a mill-race. It was not without a desperate and lengthy struggle that the boys managed to get out of its now no longer friendly clutches into the calm water close inshore.

But, to their exceeding relief, they did do so, and

then, paddling as they had never paddled before in their lives, they had at last the gratification of feeling their little craft's keel ground on the beach.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Safe ashore!" cried Tom. "We are all right now, Dick, old boy!"

"For the time being certainly," answered Dick.

Before them was a narrow strip of yellow sand, gleaming gold in the sunlight, with behind a lovely tropical forest, from which came the ceaseless trilling and chatter of birds.

Tumbling out over the gunwhales into the shallows, the boys dragged the boat up high and dry, then set off, stumbling, staggering, and tottering, but withal whooping like Red Indians, over the warm sands towards the forest, where they hoped to find that food and water of which they stood in such sore need.

Into the depths of the thicket they plunged, heedless of the dangers in the shape of wild beasts or venomous reptiles it might contain, and they were speedily plucking and devouring the luscious, juicy tropical fruits that grew in such abundance around them.

There were bananas, bread-fruits, guavas, pine-apples, and plantains, and the castaways had never before made such a meal as they did then. They ate their fill, and washed down the delicious fare with long, deep draughts of cool, fresh water from a small stream that trickled down to the sea just there.

Considerably strengthened and reinvigorated by these refreshments, they bethought them of the ne-

cessity of arming themselves in the best way possible in case they were attacked by wild beasts.

Accordingly with their knives they cut themselves two stout cudgels, as well as a couple of long bamboo canes.

Their next concern was their boat, which they feared might, by a turn in the tide, be floated off and swept out to sea.

So they "legged" it in haste back to the beach, and finding the little craft, to their relief, as they had left her, they hauled her across the sands to the fringe of the forest. "We'll hide her in a thicket, covering her with leaves and underwood, so that any savages passing the spot will not be likely to discover her," said Dick.

That done, they set off along the shore northward in search of a cave in which to take up their quarters, for that night at least. Warily they skirted the water's edge, putting as much of the beach as they possibly could between them and the edge of the covert, lest some beast of prey or lurking savages should pounce out suddenly on them.

They hoped from the bottom of their hearts that the island was uninhabited, in the face of the cannibalistic fame that still attaches, rightly or wrongly, to the Papuans.

Making the circumference of the bay without meeting with any such undesirable adventure, they came to a wild and rugged part of the shore.

High and precipitous cliffs towered above them now,

and a little further along a great rocky headland projected far into the sea. "We ought to find a suitable cave here, Tom."

"Sure!"

They were speedily clambering about and searching eagerly among the rocks. But it was not until after about an hour's diligent hunting, and when they were quite exhausted, that they at length stumbled upon what they considered the very place.

It was some distance up the side of the headland, at a point where this was not so precipitous. A steep path, in some places hollowed out almost like artificial steps and stairs, led from the beach up to a cavern of a commodious size. Indeed, they found that it ran back further into the bowels of the cliff than they cared just then to explore.

"How's this for high?" Tom asked, and he threw himself full length upon the rocky floor, clasping his hands under his head. "Beats Robinson Crusoe to fits, I say!"

They had brought some bananas and guavas with them, and on these they lunched, afterwards wasting nearly the whole afternoon lolling there at the mouth of the cave, alternately talking of their chances of being taken off, and straining their eyes out to sea in the vain hope of catching sight of a sail or a steamer's smoke.

As evening approached, they descended again to the beach, and collected on the skirts of the woods enough

dry leaves and brushwood to make a couple of beds or litters, besides a fair stock of fruit for breakfast next morning.

They were climbing the precipitous path to the cave with the last of these supplies when they heard a loud cry below them.

Starting in mingled terror and surprise, they turned and beheld, to their unutterable alarm, three large canoes, full of armed savages, almost immediately beneath them.

In the bows of the foremost canoe a tall, powerful-looking savage, whose elaborate, not to say gorgeous headgear betokened him a chief, was standing pointing up at them and clearly calling the attention of all the others to them.

CHAPTER V

CHASED BY SAVAGES

THE boys' hearts almost stood still for the minute.

Then, with gasps of consternation, both scampered up the rugged pathway as fast as they could, scrambling over the boulders and clambering up precipitous places like wild cats, utterly reckless of the danger they ran of slipping and falling. Had such a mishap occurred they would assuredly have gone rolling over and over down the steep descent to the very feet of the savages.

These set up a chorus of demoniacal yells, and paddled quickly to the beach immediately below.

Every minute the apprentices expected a shower of arrows to be sent after them, but, to their inexpressible relief, none came. The savages did not appear to have bows with them.

"It is no use taking refuge in the cave, Tom," panted Dick. "This way—this way! We must try and dodge them in the woods. It's our only chance."

So past the cave they scrambled, and on up the almost straight wall of cliff. But only some score or so more yards they went, then they halted in unspeakable, numbing despair.

The rocky stairway, as it was, rather than a path,

stopped, and they were faced by a sheer perpendicular wall of cliff fully fifty feet in height, that extended to the cliff top.

"Oh, heaven!" groaned Tom Merritt, "we are caught like rats in a trap. We cannot climb any higher. Let us get back to the cave. There, at any rate, we may be able to conceal ourselves."

"Stay, stay! Look, look! *There are steps cut in the rock!* We can climb it by means of them. Come on, follow me and keep your head cool. Think you're shinning up to the main-trunk of the old *Albatross*."

The steps Dick Selwyn referred to were small holes dug ladderwise in the towering wall of cliff. They ran up from close by to the very summit.

Dick wondered who could have cut them. Surely not the natives?

But it was no time to puzzle over such a point. Up and up, behind each other—Dick second—the lads mounted with desperate haste, their sailor training standing them excellently well. They were able, after the practice they had had of climbing the ratlins at sea, fairly to run up the perpendicular wall of rock, which would have turned a landsman's head giddy.

The savages were now, though, hurrying up the rocky path below and gaining rapidly on them.

Presently a couple of light javelins struck the rock close beside the climbing boys, splintering themselves with the force that sped them. Then another rebounded almost in the face of Tom Merritt, while a

fourth went through the skirts of Dick's coat, where it stuck entangled.

And now, positively like hail, the deadly missiles pelted, rattling against the solid rock all round, above, below, and on either side of the daring young climbers. But bounding up with winged feet, both seemed to bear charmed lives.

In another minute Tom Merritt had gained the summit of the cliff and scrambled on to it. Then, with the noblest devotion, at the imminent risk of being struck by some of the throwing spears with which the air was now thickly laden, he leaned over, and, grasping Dick by the collar, fairly dragged that young fellow up beside him.

As Selwyn's legs were whisked over the cliff top, the Papuans redoubled their furious yells, and a perfect cloud of javelins followed him. The most part whizzed harmlessly over the boys' heads, but three or four passed on either side of them perilously close.

"Are you hurt, Tom, in any way?" demanded Dick, anxiously.

"No, no," was the reassuring reply.

"Thank Heaven! Then we may escape them yet, if we can get into the forest."

The boys took to their heels and ran their hardest across the open ground towards the dark fringe of woods. Once there they felt there would be a hope of their eluding their bloodthirsty pursuers.

Sprinting for all they were worth, they had almost

reached the longed-for timber when the first of the savages scrambled over the top of the cliff.

"Run, run, Tom!" screamed Dick, who had cast an anxious glance over his shoulder and seen the man appear.

The two boys flew like hares across the intervening space and plunged into the thicket. Through the dense and prickly undergrowth they burst at headlong speed, heedless of their lacerated, bleeding flesh and torn clothing.

On, on they dashed, caring nothing for the possibility of meeting with some ravenous wild beast, or stumbling upon some venomous reptile.

Their breath was coming in short, thick, labored gasps. They were almost ready to drop, but they kept on resolutely, desperately, knowing their only hope of life depended on the efforts they were making. The trailing, tangled creepers twined around their ankles and tripped them up, flinging them upon their faces again and again; but setting their teeth hard, both struggled on in almost frenzied desperation, straining their every nerve to escape their dreaded pursuers.

The luxuriant tropical growth, while it greatly impeded their career, also, however, hid them from the eyes of the savages, who were only guided as to their whereabouts by the noise they made and the broken twigs and branches. But the race must now be with the fleet-footed foe. They could never expect to out-strip him in his native wilds.

Dick Selwyn, who was leading, was the first to realize the hopelessness of further flight. The sounds of pursuit were rapidly drawing nearer.

The interlaced branches overhead just there made the forest aisles almost as dark as midnight. More than once the boys had nearly dashed out their brains against a tree trunk as they plunged on blindly.

Dick grasped his chum's arm and pointed up into the branches of a mighty monarch of the woods. He was too breathless to speak, even if it had been wise to do so.

But Tom grasped the meaning of his action.

Quickly jumping up, he caught hold of one of the boughs and clambered noiselessly into the tree. Dick followed suit, and softly, catlike, they climbed high amongst the branches, the dense foliage of which completely hid them from below.

Silent as mice then they crouched, with their hearts beating so loudly they half feared the pulsations might be heard by their fearful pursuers. Each was lying full length along a stout horizontal branch about twenty feet from the ground.

Nearer and nearer came the pursuers, howling and whooping like so many demons.

In another minute they were right underneath, and many rushed by, crashing and bursting through the tangled underwood, beating and stabbing with their long spears right and left at every bush and shrub in their way.

Had the boys still been on the ground, cowering in the heart of the brake—in the vain hope that their foes would pass them by in the ardor of pursuit—they must inevitably have been unearthed and either instantly speared or haled off miserable prisoners, to suffer, perhaps, a far worse fate.

As it was, the savages did not discover them in the tree, although half a dozen, lingering behind the others, threw darts up amongst the branches to make sure, evidently that they had not climbed up there.

But the missiles were thrown at random, and the lads escaped injury. Both had a couple of pretty narrow shaves, however, the darts flying past within an ace of their persons and cutting the leaves and twigs just above their heads.

Happily these half-dozen savages were the last of the band. The others had all rushed on, thinking the fugitives still ahead, and athirst with eagerness to come up with them.

The boys' hearts beat high with hope as they heard the last of their foes pass on.

But the next instant their hopes were again dashed down, as most blood-curdling howls and an angry hubbub told them the savages had discovered that they had concealed themselves somewhere.

Back about a dozen of the natives came surging, scattering and searching around in every direction, lunging their spears into the bushes, uprooting some and beating others down flat with their clubs and toma-

hawks. Into the branches of every tree around, too, they hurled their javelins, and the boys cowered in their friendly shelter with their hearts now indeed in their mouths.

Whizz! Thud! A spear sang through the leafy screen beside Dick Selwyn, and struck, quivering with its great impetus, in the thick branch upon which he lay, just an inch below his very heart.

Another, in its passage close over his head, cut a small trail of leaves. A twig fell on to the back of his neck, and for the minute made him almost think he was hit. He gave a jump that came near causing him to tumble off his perch.

Several of the Papuans climbed into adjacent trees, and, mounting to the top-most branches, scanned the foliage around in hopes of catching a glimpse of the fugitives. The boys could distinctly see them through the interstices of the leaves, and, in agonies of apprehension and suspense, expected every moment to hear them call out and to be transfixed with their throwing-spears.

But the gang descended without discovering them, and Dick and Tom breathed more freely as the whole pack moved off to search elsewhere for them.

The lads remained in the tree without venturing hardly to move until the shades of night began to fall over the forest and all sounds of pursuit had long since died away in the distance. Then, and not till then, did they dare to stretch their cramped limbs.

"You all right, Tom?" Dick cautiously whispered.

"Yes and you?"

"Ditto, old man, though two of their spears came pretty near settling me. Keep close still, and I'll climb into the top-most branches, take a look round, and see if any of them are in sight.

But, of course, the darkness and the dense foliage were against his seeing any distance. However, from the continued silence, they had reason to believe the search had been abandoned; so they dropped softly to the ground, and, seeing nothing of their late pursuers, stole away like shadows through the woods in the direction they believed their cave lay.

They had possessed themselves of three of the Papuan javelins which they had found sticking in the branches around them.

These weapons were stout reeds, about four feet long, headed with flint stones, cunningly cut and fastened. The boys found the points were as sharp as any knife-blade could be.

"They are poor weapons, but still they are better than none at all," observed Dick.

Creeping along with anxiously beating hearts through the well-nigh impenetrable darkness, ready to sink instantly to the ground at the first sound of a pursuer, or to turn and defend themselves against the attack of one of the numerous wild beasts that were making the night hideous around them, the boys soon put a considerable

distance between them and the scene of their late narrow escape.

But they were now in another and almost equally as awkward and perilous a plight. *They had lost themselves in the jungle*—a jungle teeming with wild beasts, as they could tell only too well from the almost incessant howls, roars, and screams that floated to their ears in truly blood-curdling chorus.

CHAPTER VI

A FIGHT WITH A LEOPARD

THE predicament now of the boys was one which would have tried the nerves of the boldest man.

They were in a trackless wilderness, full of prowling beasts of prey and venomous reptiles, and hardly able to see two paces in front of them with the inky blackness of the night, intensified as this was by the over-arching, thickly-interlaced trees. At every step some lurking brute might spring out of the bushes upon them, or they tread on a cobra, stumble over a boa-constrictor, or receive the envenomed fangs from overhead of an invisible tree-snake.

Small blame to them if they felt inclined to sink to the ground with sickening dread of the fearful perils that now beset them on every hand, and hesitated to put another foot to the ground. They did not even dare to exchange whispers lest they should attract some wild beast or rouse a sleeping reptile beside them.

Cautiously, slowly, sick with terror and acute horror of their surroundings, they progressed, however, clutching their poor weapons tightly, determined at any rate to do hard battle for their lives, if put to it and afforded only a chance.

All at once Dick pulled Tom backwards so sharply

and forcibly as almost to jerk the latter flat upon his back.

The former had caught sight of a pair of great, blazing, greenish orbs amongst the branches of a tree they were on the point of passing under.

The next instant a huge, lithe, cat-like body, looking black and monstrous in the pitchy darkness, sprang full at their faces with a snarling screech.

Both lads instinctively leaped backwards to avoid it, and Dick Selwyn, catching his foot in a protruding and trailing root of a tree, measured his length upon the ground. The savage beast flew over his head, alighting a few paces behind him. Filling the air with its screeching, it turned like lightning and bounded on top of him before he had time to scramble up.

Its weight almost crushed the life out of him, and it tore and scratched with its teeth and claws in perfect frenzy, simply stripping his coat from him in ribbons.

Fortunately, however, before it reached his flesh or could fasten upon his throat, he had recovered his presence of mind, and started stabbing wildly at its breast with one of the javelins he held.

Again and again he plunged the keen-edged weapon into its flank and throat. But the maddened creature seized the spear between its teeth, and, with one crunch of its powerful jaws, bit the head clean from the staff, rendering the weapon useless.

Dick was disarmed and placed wholly at the mercy of the ravenous brute! With the instinct of self-

preservation—the desperation that nerves even the cowardliest of us in moments of such dire peril, he tried to clutch his terrible antagonist by the throat, and managed, for all its great weight, to throw, or, rather, kick it, using both his feet together, bodily off him.

Even as he succeeded in this, Tom Merritt plunged another of the javelins almost half its length into the brute's body. Tom used the weapon as if it were a pike, thrusting with all his strength and both hands.

Pierced to the heart though it was, the infuriated animal was not yet conquered. Twisting quickly round, it forced the javelin out of Tom's hands. Then over and over it rolled and writhed in its death-throes, biting and clawing madly at the grass.

Only for a minute or so, though; then its strength left it. It gave one or two convulsive struggles and lay still.

Tom Merritt had not waited for its death, but rushed at once to his chum's side.

He was inexpressibly relieved when, in answer to his anxious inquiry, Dick assured him he was none the worse of the scrimmage than a few scratches on the hands, arms, and body. The infuriated creature's claws, however, had torn his clothing into shreds.

Getting upon his feet, Dick grasped his chum's right hand.

"Tom, you saved my life, old fellow. The brute would have made short work of me in another minute. How can I thank you?"

"By saying no more about it. Wouldn't you have done the same for me? The idea! Thanking me for a thing like that! Why, we might not be chums, to hear you talk!"

"We are chums until death, old fellow. But what was the beast? Good heavens! A leopard, and a big one at that! I *have* had an escape—a narrow squeak for it."

It *was* a leopard they had killed, but an old and not particularly powerful one. Otherwise, doubtless, another tale would have had to be told. Its claws, the lads afterwards found, were all worn down, and its gums almost toothless, which reasons accounted for its not getting either home in the struggle with Dick. Had the brute been in its prime, it would probably have torn him to pieces.

In spite of the risks they ran of another *rencontre* with a perhaps still more dreadful denizen of the jungle, Dick said:

"I must have the leopard's skin as a trophy. It would be a pity after our exploit to abandon it."

And so, while Tom stood on guard with his recovered javelin, and, in no small trepidation of another attack from some prowling monster, kept imploring of his chum in whispers to hurry, the latter flayed the dead leopard with a knife.

Naturally the operation was not performed in a very workmanlike manner, what with inexperience and the profound darkness. Perspiring and hot with his exer-

tions, Dick sawed and slashed away at the hide, temporarily deaf to the alarming noises which floated in horrid and ever-increasing chorus from the jungle around.

Suddenly there came a series of short, sharp yelps quite close, that nearly scared the wits out of Tom Merritt and made him gasp hoarsely:

"Great heavens, Dick, drop it and let us run for our lives! We forgot the jackals and other beasts will smell the blood. We may have the entire jungleful of the savage brutes round us in another minute."

Dick gasped in sympathy as he realized the truth of his chum's words. He was no longer deaf to the blood-curdling howls and screeches around.

With one desperate wrench he tore the skin from the carcass, then, wrapping it hastily over his left arm, he fled away for dear life after Tom.

That they had been wise in not delaying longer was proved a minute or two later, when a most appalling uproar was borne to their startled ears from the rear—howls and yells and screams in the tongues of half a dozen different wild animals.

Fearful that the leopard's mate or some other like beast would give them chase, scenting them by the captured skin, the boys now fairly raced through the forest, which, to their extreme delight, they found opening out, and not so dense.

In another minute or two they burst out of the woods, to their ineffable satisfaction, upon a part of the

shore they recognized, and not far from the headland on which their cave was.

There were no signs around of the savages. So, with their hearts pulsing once more with hope and heartfelt thankfulness, they ran, as swiftly as they could in their exhausted condition, down to the water's edge, and along this towards the headland looming up dimly ahead.

Another few minutes saw them safely at the top of the rugged path leading to their cave, and entering this.

Utterly worn out, they threw themselves down upon the litters of leaves and brushwood they had made. But, as soon as they had recovered their breath to be able to talk coherently, they both scrambled up into a kneeling posture, and from the depths of their hearts poured out their sincere thanks to that all-wise Providence that had brought them through so many awful perils that night.

They were grateful, and rejoiced, also, that their retreat had not been discovered by the savages, who had been too bent upon capturing them to notice it when scaling the cliff.

First satisfying their famished and almost fainting inner men on the fruit and drink they had so luckily stored up for just such an emergency, they next did their best to block up the entrance to the cave with some loose boulders that were scattered around inside and out.

"It's just possible the leopard's mate or some other beast may trail us," said Dick.

"Quite so. But this barricade will need some shifting, and these javelins should stand us in good stead, as they've already done," rejoined Tom.

Then they laid their thoroughly wearied limbs and heavy heads upon their beds of leaves, and were quickly sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Tired out as they were, it was long after noon on the following day before they woke. They breakfasted frugally, intending to nurse their supplies of food and drink until nightfall.

"Then we might venture to steal forth and replenish our larder without much risk of another encounter with the natives," remarked Dick.

Accordingly, they remained in the cave all day. They were at times deeply concerned lest the savages' suspicions had been aroused by the strange ladder of steps in the face of the rock above the cavern, and that these might return and search for them at the spot.

However, as the hours went by and no such unwelcome intruders appeared, their hopes became certainty that the savages did not suspect the whereabouts of their hiding-place.

Whose hand had cut those strange, stair-like clefts in the solid rock, the boys greatly wondered and asked each other in amazement. But they could only conclude that either the savages themselves had cut them at some time or another, or that a party of castaways,

like themselves perhaps, years and years before, had.

In the vain hope that they might find some clue to the mystery in the shape of a relic or two in the cave itself, they started to explore this, after contriving at a great expenditure of time, labor, and patience, a light, by means of striking the back of one of the knife-blades against the flint head of a javelin, and catching the sparks with some dry, tinder-like moss.

Hastily suspending the leopard skin over the narrow, tunnel-like entrance to the cave, so as to prevent the light being seen from below or at sea, they then improvised a torch, and with this explored the cave to its end.

It ran back far into the bowels of the cliff, as we have already said; but, although they traversed it to its end and examined every crevice and cranny carefully as they advanced and returned, they could find no trace of its ever having had a human inmate before.

As soon as it was dark again the lads quitted the cave, and, descending to the shore, crept cautiously to the edge of the forest. There they filled their pockets and handkerchiefs with all manner of fruit, with which they returned in safety once more to their snug retreat.

Feeling now they were safe from discovery, and beginning to think that, if it were not for their imminent risk of falling into the hands of the islanders or being devoured by wild beasts, their new, Crusoe-like life would not be half bad, they made a hearty repast.

Then, after a quiet chat as to their plans for the future, they again resigned themselves to sleep.

How long he had slept Tom had no idea, when he was roused by a loud crash.

Starting up into a sitting posture, he saw by the faint light that entered from the stars outside that one of the bowlders with which they had partially blocked up the cave entrance had been rolled back, and in its stead was a peculiar-looking, black object, for all the world something like a huge turnip.

The next instant, with a thrill of awful horror, Tom realized what that object was.

It was the plumed head of a savage, peering into the cave!

CHAPTER VII

BESIEGED BY THE CANNIBALS

THE first thrill of horror past, Tom Merritt bounded to his feet with a ringing yell of alarm that might have wakened the dead.

As well as effectually rousing Dick Selwyn, it startled the savage so much that the man let go his grip of the lip of the cave-mouth and fell backwards. He rolled down the steep slope, unable to stop himself, and, presumably, knocked several others over in his headlong descent, judging from the confused uproar which ensued.

The two lads grasped their javelins and knife-lances, and stood prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible, with all the resolute courage of true young Yankees.

They knew they were trapped like rats in a hole—that flight was now quite out of the question, but, as they set their teeth hard, they each registered a vow deep down in their hearts that, if die they must, they would die fighting to the last gasp, and at the cost of an enemy's life for every gasp.

"Courage, Tom!" breathed Dick, through his clenched teeth. "We can only die once, so let us meet our ends like men. I, for my part, intend to resist to

the bitter end. Reckon it will not be my fault if I am taken prisoner, to be roasted and eaten by these horrid cannibals."

"You are sure, then, they are cannibals?" asked Tom, in a horrified whisper, shuddering at the prospect that his chum's rather ill-timed words had called up.

Dick's answer, if he did make one, was drowned by a yell which nearly froze the lads' blood in their veins. Then there came the patter of innumerable bare feet up the rocky path, and a perfect shower of arrows and javelins came sailing in over the breastwork of rocks.

Fortunately, the lads were standing on either side of the entrance, and thus escaped being struck down by any of the deadly shafts.

Both held in their right hands a fair-sized fragment of rock to hurl at the heads of the foremost invaders, and gripped their javelins and knives in their left hands. Their cudgels lay on ledges beside them, ready to be caught up when needed.

Almost immediately three hideous faces appeared simultaneously in the cave-mouth. Quick as thought, Tom and Dick threw the stones. At such close quarters they could not have missed, and two of the invaders, struck full in the face, fell headlong backwards upon the others pressing up behind.

The third man, however, ducking to miss the low roof, cleared the barricade at a bound, and rushed at Dick with uplifted tomahawk.

That moment would undoubtedly have been the

brave young apprentice's last, but for the fact that the savage had overlooked the lowness of the cavern roof. The weapon encountered this, and was knocked out of the man's grasp by the violence of his own blow, while he himself was sent reeling heavily backwards.

Dashing quickly at him, before he could recover himself, Dick plunged one of the javelins deep into his great, naked chest. He sank to the floor, groaning horribly, and evidently mortally wounded.

Wheeling round, Dick beheld Tom hotly engaged with two more of the savages, who were thrusting at him with their spears and forcing him to recoil, while they scrambled over the breastwork.

Dick, without waiting to take proper aim, shied one of his javelins at the head of one of the pair. It struck the native sideways upon the skull, doing him no great injury, but diverting the lunge he was making with his spear—a lunge that would probably have robbed Tom of life.

The hurt indeed disconcerted him so much that he lost his balance, astride of the breastwork as he was, and fell forward, his forehead striking the rocky floor of the cavern with an awful thud.

The second savage at this drew back, as if inclined to fly, Tom pounced upon the fallen man's spear, wrested it from his nerveless grasp, and hastily thrust it through the other's arm. The native uttered an agonized yell and toppled backwards on the top of two others, who were clambering into the cave with

their spears gripped between their clenched teeth, like dogs carrying sticks.

Down the precipitous path the whole three went rolling, sweeping off the others swarming up, just as flies might be brushed from a wall. Howls of terror and pain came up to the ears of the two heroic lads, mingled with the rattling of stones and *débris*, and the heavy thudding of the falling human bodies.

Some of the savages, unable to save themselves, went tumbling from rock to rock and ledge to ledge, till they landed, battered and mangled, at the base of the cliff.

In the cave, Dick Selwyn promptly thrust his remaining javelin through the back of the islander sprawling face downward, stunned, over the barricade, and then caught up the tomahawk dropped by the first man he had slain.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, jubilantly, "we have repulsed the first assault, and may beat them off yet, with Heaven's help."

"I sincerely hope so, old fellow," panted Dick, "but I greatly fear our chances are very small. Had they come on with more dash, I don't think either of us would be alive this minute. That last was only a half-hearted rush after all. They'll be fairly mad now at their failure and loss, and come on next time, sure, like veritable demons. We will have all our work cut out to keep them out, take my tip for it!"

"Say, Dick, we might roll these loose boulders down on their heads as they come up."

"The very thing! You take the right side, and I'll take the left again. Be careful in rolling the rocks over that you don't lose your footing and go down with one of them. Keep back—keep back! They're going to shoot again."

The lads cowered back against the sides of the cave, while shower after shower of arrows and javelins whistled in at the narrow entrance and rattled like hail upon the rocky roof and walls.

A short pause, and then up the cliff again came clambering the savages, in a surging, crowding mass, with their spears and knives between their teeth.

This time it was evident there was to be no half-heartedness in their attack, no hanging back. They came on in grim and deadly earnest, like a pack of hounds with the quarry in view, scrambling up the rocks like cats.

The silence now was more appalling than the previous whoops and yells.

Using the spears of the slain savages as levers, the two heroic apprentices in frenzied haste proceeded to roll the boulders over upon the climbers. But these were thoroughly infuriated, and, with awful determination, continued to press upwards, seemingly heedless of the madly plunging rocks that plowed positive lanes through them, crushing and maiming or hurling headlong from the dizzy height all who were struck.

The boulders were exhausted, and yet the Papuans were fighting their way up the rocks, clambering up

anyhow and anyway, sometimes mounting on each other's shoulders. The boys could see their dark figures plainly now against the faint sheen of the sea.

"The darts and arrows—throw them down!" panted Dick.

And the boys, hastily groping on the rocky floor around them in the darkness for the spent missiles, began launching them at the upswarming horde, occasionally striking down or wounding a man.

Just as the lads, in utter despair, saw that the dusky fiends must gain the cave-mouth in another minute, and overwhelm them by numbers, a peculiar cry was heard from the rear of the attacking party.

Instantly, as if it were a signal for retreat, the Papuans all began scrambling back down the rocks again, to Dick's and Tom's ineffable relief.

"Dick," gasped Merritt, as he mopped his face, upon which the perspiration stood in great beads, "why should we stay here, to be eventually killed or taken, for certain? Why not make a bolt for the cliff-top?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed his chum, to whom the idea had not seemed practical before. "By George, we'll try it! Come on, Tom, but softly. With Heaven's help, we'll do the fiends again."

The Papuans had withdrawn out of sight, but they could be heard jabbering away excitedly, doubtlessly formulating some other plan for the storming of the cavern.

As noiselessly as cats the lads crept from the cave,

and started to climb up the cliff to the ladder of clefts in the perpendicular wall of rock overhead.

But they had not ascended more than a few feet when Dick accidentally kicked against and dislodged a loose fragment of rock. Away it went, plunging down the steep, bounding and rebounding from rock to rock, and waking all the silent echoes of the night with the noise it made.

It was only a mercy of Providence that prevented both lads following it in their consternation.

There came a chorus of fierce yells and shouts from the savages, who, guessing at once the besieged were attempting to escape, came springing up the rocks again *en masse*.

The boys threw all further caution to the winds and fled for their lives. They scrambled, clambered up at imminent hazard of falling or rolling headlong to the bottom into the midst of their savage foes.

But fast as they climbed, the natives were swifter and surer of foot and eye.

Both lads constantly tripped and stumbled in the dark, but they always managed to save themselves by clinging to the rocks, though the jagged edges of these nearly cut their fingers to the bone.

Up and on they struggled and toiled. The darkness also befriended them, for the savages could only shoot arrows and hurl darts at random.

The ladder! Would they never reach it? Oh, how much further off was it?

At last—at last they gained it, but they were so winded by their mad upward scramble, they dared not trust themselves upon it for the minute. The islanders seemed to have lungs like bellows, and never once abated their efforts, scaling the precipitous path like goats.

“Up, up, Tom; every second means life or death. If you slip or fall, I may be able to save you. Cling your tightest, and pray in your heart for strength. Save your breath, you’ll need it.”

Up that most precarious ladder they went, warily, but by no means slowly, for here they were quite at home, so to speak. Any one but a sailor, of course, would have found it the worst part of the whole flight, and, probably, in the circumstances, flying from fierce and blood-famished foes, would have lost his nerve and foothold or been seized with giddiness.

Gaining the crest of the crag, Tom was about to drag himself up, when a tall savage suddenly rose before him from the ground.

With a sort of cackling laugh, the native made a clutch for his collar, but jerking himself backwards on the instant, while clinging for dear life to the grooved steps with both hands, Merritt evaded it, and the Papuan, unable to stop himself, took a header clean over him down the precipice.

The doomed wretch’s shriek cleft the air like a whistle as his body disappeared in the darkness.

Hastily Tom and Dick swung themselves up and clambered over the brink. As they did so two more islanders came rushing up, one with leveled spear, the other brandishing a great knotted ironwood club.

CHAPTER VIII

A TERRIBLE FLIGHT

DICK SELWYN's blood was up, and no thought of surrender entered his head.

Undauntedly, he nimbly skipped aside so as to avoid the murderous thrust the native with the spear made at him, and then, ducking to escape a blow from the other's club, clutched the spear just where the head was fastened to the staff, and rushed in upon its owner.

Never pausing to draw one of the javelins or the tomahawk he had brought away from the cave with him, belted round his waist, he let out with his right fist straight from the shoulder. He caught the Papuan full between the eyes and knocked the man flying backwards.

Dick had stuck with his left hand to the spear, and he now found himself the owner of this. He was a singularly strong and well-set-up young fellow for his age, and as quick and alert as he was strong.

Wheeling with blazing eyes and tight-set teeth, he saw the foeman with the club about to dash out the brains of his chum, who had dropped on both knees at the edge of the cliff.

With a roar like a wild beast, Dick rushed at the man and caught him full in the ribs with a thrust from

the lance, just as his club was descending. The savage tottered for a moment on the brink of the cliff, then, with a horrid screech, toppled sideways, also, over it into space.

Leaving Tom to scramble into safety, Dick turned then to attend to the remaining savage. But, to his exceeding relief, he saw the fellow racing away for dear life.

"To the woods again!" cried Dick. They were racing away when they suddenly saw half a dozen more Papuans appear dead ahead. The gang seemed to rise out of the very ground itself in the darkness.

Dick and Tom pulled up with ejaculations of utter despair; and the latter, now terrified beyond measure, began to gasp out a prayer to Heaven.

They were caught between two fires—fairly trapped, it seemed.

No, not yet.

"Along the cliffs—along the cliffs, Tom!" Dick shouted. And he set the example, flying away, at a speed that astonished himself, at right angles to their former course.

The savages in front broke and scattered to head them off; but Tom Merritt was incapable of another effort. He was spent, and, staggering with exhaustion, a faint feeling attacked him, a blood-red mist gathered before his eyes, and, though he ran on for some little distance in answer to his chum's call, he ran blindly and in quite the opposite direction.

Then—then he felt himself suddenly seized from behind, and a naked, muscular arm thrown round his neck. He was flung violently to the ground, and was just conscious of two or three natives kneeling upon him and disarming him, ere all became a blank.

Meanwhile how was Dick Selwyn faring?

Dashing away like a hunted stag, he had gone some distance before he missed Tom; then, casting an anxious glance over his shoulder, he could see nothing of the latter. But exultant yells in the darkness behind told him his chum was either killed or captured.

He groaned in keenest anguish of heart, and stopped running. If Tom were dead, he had no wish to live. He would go back and share his dear old chum's fate whatever it was.

But the instinct of self-preservation is strong within us all, and as Dick saw the ferocious-looking natives closing in upon him, brandishing their clubs, lances, and throwing-spears, and heard their blood-curdling whoops and yells, he felt he must make yet another desperate struggle for his own safety.

The natives had opened out into extended order, the better to head him off. He now hastily noted where the line was thinnest, and dashed straight at that point.

Those on the wings thereupon converged inwards to try and enclose him. But Dick ran as if he had winged feet. He had got his second "wind," and was lasting out in a way which surprised him beyond measure. He could scarcely believe that it was himself thus flying

along at such an extraordinary pace. But he had ever been accounted at school a fleet and powerful runner.

The savages, either believing they had him for certain this time or afraid of injuring one another as they closed in around him in an enveloping half-moon, forbore to throw or shoot at him. He tore forward, with head bent, and tightly gripping his tomahawk. He had already tossed aside the long lance as a useless encumbrance.

It was a huge and brawny savage at whom he was directly charging. The man, instead of halting and awaiting him, rushed to meet him with poised spear.

A sudden recollection of what a Wild West trapper had once done in somewhat similar circumstances occurred to Dick. He himself afterwards averred it was a heaven-sent inspiration.

He stopped short and spread out his arms.

Just as he had hoped, the action startled and confounded the giant native. The man stumbled in his stride, and the javelin shot from his grasp ere he could take aim. It flew wide of Dick, who, instantly dodging to one side as his great, bulky foeman lumbered heavily past, positively hamstrung the latter with one terrific side slash of the tomahawk.

With an awful screech the herculean black went down all of a heap, and Dick, losing not a moment, sprang on and away before a second Papuan could bear down upon him. He was through the line of

foes now, and stretching grandly for the timber, not ten paces further.

He reached the woods, and dashed in among the trees, bursting furiously, irresistibly, through the thick undergrowth. Panting, straining, gasping, he struggled onward through the impenetrable darkness of the forest, running forward heedlessly. Providence alone prevented him in that blind, frenzied hurry through the well-nigh pitch-dark jungle dashing out his brains against some tree or low-hanging bough.

Again and again he was tripped up and flung upon his face by the creepers and tangled grasses and choked underbrush, but each time he scrambled up and tore on.

The temporary madness, however, left him as suddenly as it had come. He suddenly awoke to the fact that there were no sounds of pursuit, that he had again escaped from the terrible blacks, and he was on the point of halting, when suddenly the earth seemed to open beneath him.

One piercing cry of horror and despair broke from his lips as he felt himself plunging feet foremost down, down, into what seemed an eternity of inky space; and then all consciousness left him—he knew no more.

When Tom Merritt opened his eyes again on this world, it was to find himself tied by plaited withes to a tree, at the edge of the forest. Immediately in front of him, but about thirty paces distant, was crackling

and roaring a great bonfire, the tongues of flame shooting fully fifteen feet into the air.

Dancing, or rather parading, round the blazing pile, were his captors, some score or so in number—no more. The firelight revealed that they all were in their war-paint. Their dusky bodies were covered with white stripes, and white rings encircled their eyes.

Their head-dress added to their horrible and truly fear-inspiring aspect. Great tufts of many-colored feathers were stuck in their luxuriant hair, which was matted and smeared with some glutinous substance that made it stand bolt upright on the top of the head, thus considerably increasing their height, to all appearance.

Many of them had pieces of bone or wood stuck through their noses and earlobes, while some wore necklets, bracelets, and anklets of feathers, sharks' teeth, and bears' claws.

The dance, for such it was meant to be—though the performers simply strutted round with their legs quite stiff, and occasionally brandished their spears and javelins, pointing these at and sometimes poking them into the fire—was conducted to the primitive and monotonous music evolved by the rhythmical tapping of bows with arrows by some half a dozen more savages, seated on a bank of earth near.

Round and round the bonfire the savages paraded two or three times in absolute silence. Then suddenly, one, who, from a leopard-skin upon his shoulders and

a woven plume of bird-of-paradise feathers that fell down also upon his shoulders, was evidently a chief, let out a frightful yell.

Thereupon all began a peculiar crooning, low at first, but gradually swelling in volume, until it reached a wild, frenzied shout.

Now every man, including the musicians—to call them such for want of a more appropriate name—began bounding and leaping about, up and down, and from side to side, as if trying to work themselves up into a frenzied rage.

This was exactly what they were doing, and poor Tom, who was viewing the strange spectacle in agonized apprehension of what it might portend, nearly swooned again with unutterable horror, as, letting off one united screech, like that of the whistle of a locomotive, the entire band broke their ring and came tearing straight for him, to a man tossing aside their spears as they ran, and whipping forth their tomahawks and knives.

It was plain that the crazed wretches meant to hew him to pieces where he stood, and each man seize a portion of him for the horrible cannibal feast the dance was a prelude to. But while yet more than half a dozen yards divided the fiendish mob from their helpless victim, a strange figure glided swiftly out from amongst the trees behind the latter and stepped in front of him—the figure of a tall and majestic-looking white woman!

She was not merely clad in white flowing garments

from neck to heel, but had a white face and white hands —was a woman with the lily-white skin of a European!

The only thing black about her was her hair, which fell in rippling, raven-hued masses to her waist.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHITE QUEEN

TOM MERRITT could not realize for several minutes that the whole thing was not some hideous nightmare, some awful phantasm conjured up by his disordered and over-excited brain.

And this belief was by no means dispelled by a closer scrutiny of the fair apparition which now interposed between him and the yelling cannibals.

Surely it was all a chimera of his diseased mind—the state of his nerves!

The woman, who appeared to be about forty years of age, had numerous live snakes and serpents, large and small, coiled round her arms, her waist, and even her neck and shoulders. Her body was simply swathed with the loathsome reptiles, which included several of the most dangerous species.

The venomous creatures kept up a ceaseless hissing, just like kittens purring, blinking their eyes contentedly, and swaying their long, curved necks slowly from side to side.

The entire band of savages had stopped dead on the instant at sight of her. The wretches were now positively shrinking from before her glance of scorn and

rage, like whipped curs. Their faces were filled with fear and dismay and awe, all combined.

They looked as if they would gladly have sunk through the ground—that is, all except the chief, the fellow with the bird-of-paradise plume. He growled out something in the native tongue, and a gleam of sullen fury and malignity shone in his eyes.

Immediately, the woman uttered a shout that was unintelligible to Tom, but while it was still ringing in his ears there came the loud twangs of several bow-strings, and he saw half a dozen bright streaks flash before his eyes.

The chief dropped with a low, gurgling groan, and the startled apprentice saw half a dozen six-foot long heavy war-arrows, buried half-way to the unfeathered butts, sticking in his naked chest and between his ribs. He never moved another muscle; he was slain outright.

Simultaneous with his fall, a perfect cloud of Papuan warriors swarmed into view out of the covert behind Tom. Hastily ranging themselves in some degree of order, they faced the followers of the dead chief, with poised throwing-spears mostly. A few near at hand had great bows bent and arrows drawn to the heads.

The would-be cannibals did the wisest thing they could do in the face of this imposing array. They all threw themselves prostrate upon the earth, and begged for mercy in the native tongue.

The mysterious white woman thereupon turned to her partisans and bade them put up their weapons.

Next she issued a loud command, and two men approached, bearing between them a huge wicker basket-box.

This they set open on the ground before her. She uttered a series of quick, sharp cries, and all the reptiles twined about her, except one—the tiniest but still probably the deadliest—disengaged themselves from her. Sliding to the ground, they at once made for and crawled inside the box, one after the other. She closed the lid on them and fastened it, and the attendants carried it away again.

Then, without a word, she approached Tom Merritt, and, drawing a knife from her belt, cut the withes that bound him to the tree.

“You Ingleze or *Americano*, ees it not so?” she now said, in broken English, to the lad’s profound astonishment. “You no speak Spanish?”

“No,” Tom gasped out. “I can only speak English. Yes, I am an American. Are you, then, Spanish?”

“No, not Spanish,” she replied, “but *Sud Americano*. I come from Peru—Lima. My name, Dolores Balta. I rule it as a queen among these people. But my story a long one. I tell it you another more fitting time. Be not afraid, though. I think I can save your life.”

The woman’s face was not that of a good woman. There were the unmistakable traces of a stormy and misspent life upon it. It was stamped, too, with latent cruelty, and vindictiveness.

Still, it was by no means repulsive, but, on the con-

trary, would have been considered rarely beautiful. It was the face of a handsome fiend in woman's form. To Tom Merritt, though, it represented at that moment that of a guardian angel.

She issued an order in the native tongue, and some of her following advanced to the prostrate cannibals and dispossessed them of their weapons. Then she commanded the disarmed men to rise, which they did tremblingly and in abject submission.

She spoke to them sharply and angrily, and all the other savages looked at them as if they were in disgrace. Señora Balta appeared to be rating them soundly for their bad conduct.

At the close of her address she turned again to Tom Merritt, who was standing by a surprised spectator, and said in her broken English, which we will not always give verbatim:

"I have put a stop to cannibalism among these people. The band that captured you, though, were led by a sub-chief, who has again and again rebelled against my authority, and some weeks back separated from the rest of the tribe and fled to this part of the island to start a nation of their own. It is well for you we ran them to earth when we did."

Tom thought so too.

The savages now formed themselves at a word from their White Queen into marching order, placing the captured rebels in their midst. Tom Merritt needed

not the injunction from Señora Balta to keep close to her as he valued his life.

Ere the start was made, however, the slain rebel chief, as well as all those of his followers who had fallen at the hands of Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt, and whom their companions had intended likewise to eat, were thrown over the cliffs into deep water by some of the queen's own bodyguard.

Tom shrewdly suspected from this action that Señora Balta feared that, if the corpses were buried, some of the malcontents of the tribe might pay the spot a flying visit a day or two later and resurrect and eat them.

He shuddered as he reflected he would now probably be thrown into daily intercourse with these human monsters.

A most elaborate palanquin was next brought forward for the accommodation of the White Queen.

It consisted of a kind of deck or invalid's chair slung on poles, and had an awning of woven grass and palm leaves to shield the occupant from the sun, supported by four fantastically carved and ornamented uprights. Eight natives carried it on their shoulders, four men to each pole, two in front and two behind. An upset and an awkward spill, through one of the bearers chancing to slip or stumble, was thus avoided.

We have likened the conveyance to a deck or invalid's chair, for it was constructed on pretty much the same lines, and could be raised or lowered at will, so

as to accommodate the occupant in either a sitting or recumbent position, there being a rest arranged for the feet in the former case.

The bearers laid the palanquin on the ground, the queen seated herself in it, then they raised it shoulder-high, and the march was begun. Tom Merritt walked beside the palanquin, which was in the middle of the procession, the captured rebels being just in front of it, guarded on all sides.

About twenty men of the queen's bodyguard marched on either side of their royal mistress. They were all big, stalwart fellows, and each was armed with a bow and quiver containing about a score arrows, a bundle of javelins or throwing-spears, a shield made of light wood and toughened hide, and a short, heavy club, as well as a tomahawk, for use at close quarters.

The bow and quiver they carried slung over the shoulder, the shield strapped on the left arm, and the spears in the left hand, the right hand being empty and free to grasp the best weapon for any emergency. The tomahawk and club were stuck in the strip of skin covering their middles.

As they struck off through the forest at a fairly smart pace, Tom Merritt found considerable difficulty in keeping up, in his weak and utterly worn-out condition. And this, fortunately for him, Señora Balta was quick to perceive. She immediately called a halt, and directed some of her bodyguard to rig up a rude ham-

mock of skins, tied to two saplings, and carry the exhausted lad in it.

This, in the hands of four natives, made a fairly comfortable conveyance, in spite of occasional jerks and jolts and the continual dodging of the overhanging boughs of the forest.

Tom could have closed his eyes and gone to sleep, he was so wearied with all he had endured, but Señora Balta preferred to talk to him. She was naturally delighted beyond measure at having met with one of her own color, a fellow-European, if not a countryman, after all the years she had been living amongst the savages without seeing one white face or hearing a word of Christian speech.

She ordered the lad's bearers to march alongside her palanquin, so that she could converse easily with him.

She then immediately plied him with eager questions, in her broken English, as to how he came upon the island, whether he had been alone, and, if not, where his companions were. Tom proceeded to tell her his story from the beginning, but she interrupted him impatiently with the repeated inquiry.

"But how you come on de island, and where all de others who must have been wid you?"

"There were only two of us came to the island," Tom replied. "Another lad named Richard Selwyn and myself. What has become of him I don't know. When we were chased by the savages, I lost sight of him. He

may have got clear away into the interior and be hiding there; but I greatly fear he was overtaken and killed."

"No—no," the woman interposed, quickly. "Had they killed him his body would have been amongst the others. The horrid monsters would have brought it along to eat also."

"Of course; I never thought of that," exclaimed Tom, his heart instantly bounding high with hope and joy at the certainty now that Dick had escaped. "Then he must still be alive. We must find him."

"You forget there are wild beasts in the woods. Your friend may have fallen a victim to one of them," said the woman, quietly and in a careless, indifferent tone which made the boy look at her in surprise, while his heart was immediately filled again with awful anxiety as to his chum's fate.

He was thrilled through with horror at the reflection her last rather callous remark had suggested.

"So you were castaways," Señora Balta went on in a musing tone, and with evident disappointment. "I had hoped you came from a ship that had put into the island. Then there would have been a chance of a cruiser being sent to look for or avenge you. I am bitterly disappointed."

Thereafter she relapsed into a moody silence, presently making a sign for Tom's bearers to fall to the rear of her palanquin with him, and thus putting an end to their further conversation.

Our apprentice, though rather surprised, not to say

mortified, at this abrupt dismissal, was not altogether sorry, for he felt too tired to talk, and could hardly keep his eyes open. Very shortly he once more lost consciousness in a balmy and restful sleep, despite the occasional disconcerting jerks and jolts of his hammock.

CHAPTER X

A FEARFUL TALE

WHEN Tom Merritt again opened his eyes, he found himself afloat in a great war-canoe, something like a Malay proa, with an outrigger to prevent its capsizing in the boiling surf of those waters.

He was lying on a mat in the stern upon a sort of platform, which had an awning of woven rushes and leaves. Beside him, on the chair of her palanquin, sat the White Queen. Behind was the steersman, and forward there were from thirty to forty warriors. The canoe was propelled by a widespreading lateen sail.

Raising himself on his elbow, Tom saw there were some twenty other canoes all round them, and that they were skirting the shore, which was about a hundred yards distant. Each boat had a prow about four feet high, surmounted by a grotesquely-carved figurehead.

Señora Balta turned immediately Tom stirred, and inquired if he felt better after his sleep; then, without waiting for his answer, bade him tell her all his story. He did so, and this time she listened quietly without interrupting him.

He simply related that the second mate, Carker, had stirred up a mutiny and killed Captain Somers and the first mate, making no mention of the vigorous defense

the latter had made in the cabin with his and Dick Selwyn's aid, nor of the alleged motive of the mutineers; how Carker had cast him and Dick adrift in an open boat, and how they had drifted to the island and had their encounters with the savages.

She appeared to listen apathetically to the latter part of his tale, and her eyes took on a fierce, smoldering light as if it had recalled some terrible episode in her own life. When he had finished she sat looking away across the sea with a preoccupied air and a strange, unholy glitter in her dark, boldly handsome eyes for long enough.

At length she turned and said:

"And now, I suppose, you would like to hear how I came amongst these people—how I became the queen of a cannibal island," with a hollow, mirthless laugh.

Tom said he would.

"I will not tell you all my past," she continued, bitterly. "I may some day, but not now. I would gladly forget the first twenty years or so of my life. They were stained with folly and sin and crime. Suffice it to say that I was married at eighteen to a man who was as unprincipled a rogue, as villainous a cutthroat, as ever lived. He was the master of a small coasting vessel, ostensibly trading between Callao and Iquique, but really engaged in smuggling, and worse. Not only did he act as the receiver and disposer of the ill-gotten spoils of a gang of banditti infesting the mountains of Tarapaca, but he also did not hesitate to com-

mit the most atrocious acts of piracy when he could do so with little risk of discovery. Many an unfortunate vessel lying anchored in fancied security in the creeks and river-mouths along the Peruvian coast did he and his crew board, and cut out under cover of the darkness, and, having pillaged of everything of value, scuttle, or set fire to."

"What happened to their crews?" gasped Tom, in lively horror at this dreadful narrative.

"Oh, they either had their throats cut at the outset, or were thrown overboard, bound and gagged, and with weights attached to their feet. Pedro Balta never showed man, woman, or child mercy. And yet—and yet I once loved that man—loved him to such distraction that I could overlook his fiendish deeds.

"Yes, well may you shrink from me, brave youth. I was as bad as he every whit in those days. But to get on. During one of the revolutions that periodically convulse that most unhappy land, it came to my husband's ears that a number of wealthy residents of Lima had chartered a brig of three hundred tons, on which they had placed their property in money and jewelry. The intention was to convey this treasure, which included a large quantity of monastic plate from the cathedral, to Chile. Altogether, the plate, specie, and jewelry, was valued at over two millions sterling.

"Balta determined to seize the treasure. With a chosen band, the very night before the intended flight, he cut out the brig, though it was within hail of a

Peruvian man-of-war. The watch on deck were surprised and slain before one of them could raise the alarm, and the rest of her crew were murdered in turn in their bunks."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom, excited, and almost scrambling to his feet in his amazement and horror. "The story you are telling me is very much like that Miguel Alvarez stirred up the mutiny aboard the *Albatross* with."

The woman turned upon him with the color coming and going rapidly in her cheeks, her eyes ablaze with unspeakable fury and surprise, and her breath issuing from between her tight-shut teeth in short, thick gasps.

"Miguel Alvarez!" she positively screamed. "That double-dyed ruffian! You have heard the story from *him*? Oh, that he were before me at this minute that I might tear his false, treacherous heart out; or no—no, rather have him tortured slowly to death in the most fiendish manner these savages I rule over could conceive. The white-livered dog! False alike to friend or foe—"

The frenzied shriek in which she had begun this passionate outburst died away in an unintelligible mumble, and she sat for some minutes after, speechless with the rage into which she had worked herself.

"So," she grated, at last, through her clenched teeth, turning again to Tom. "Alvarez sailed aboard the same vessel as you? He stirred up the crew to mutiny, you say, with the tale of this treasure? He is coming here,

then, in search of it;" and her eyes glittered ominously at the thought of again meeting the object of her hate and rage. "I suppose calms or contrary winds have detained him. Well, he will find more than he expects. Ha, ha, ha!"

Again she was silent, and then:

"Did you hear the whole tale? Surely he never told all—how he, Pepé Garcia, and half a dozen others of the worst of the band murdered Balta and the rest, after the treasure had been buried here on this island, and marooned me on a neighboring one, a barren, treeless lump of rock, with no springs or brooks, and uninhabited except by the sea-fowl that roosted in its crags. There I should have perished miserably of thirst or starvation or by my own hand in my frenzy, had I not been seen by these Papuans, who were passing the islet in their canoes. They took me off in the incipient stage of madness, and on account of my color, thinking me a superior being, they treated me with the highest honors. Their king, Stralik, made me his principal wife, and on his death I became, without very much opposition on the part of the lesser chiefs, their supreme queen. That is my story, boy. What think you of it?"

"It is a fearful one, señora," replied Tom, unable to repress a shudder and a certain feeling of abhorrence for this woman, who had been the voluntary consort of such a lawless and cutthroat band as she had described her husband to have led.

"But it differs greatly," he went on, after a minute

or two, "to that Alvarez told—according to Carker's account, at least."

"I suppose it does," she returned. "It isn't to be expected that Alvarez would tell the truth. He couldn't if he tried."

Merritt gave her the version he had heard from Carker, whereupon she assured him that hers was the correct one, and that it was most likely Alvarez, Garcia, and Diaz had got rid of their fellow-pirates before reaching Honolulu.

"Anyhow," she ended up exultantly with, "it is sweeter to me than a new lease of life to learn the dogs are coming back within reach of my vengeance. Oh, but I will be terribly revenged if they only fall into my hands. And they shall—they shall! I know the spot they will make for, and I shall be there awaiting them—well backed. Confusion! They may have already arrived, and, finding the treasure gone from the place where they buried it, sailed off again. Oh, no, no, no! Fate would not cheat me of my just and cherished revenge like that.

"No, no! I know Miguel Alvarez and Pepé Garcia too well to think for a minute that they would go off again quickly, without a prolonged stay and search for that wealth they have sold their souls over and over again for, and would as often yet again, to possess. They can have no suspicion the island is inhabited. It is not, as a matter of fact, on that side."

And so she went on for some time muttering and

mumbling to herself, sometimes lapsing into her native Spanish, communing with herself, oblivious now of Tom's presence.

She spoke but seldom to the apprentice after this, and he was not sorry, for her awful threats of vengeance, the terrible way in which she spoke and looked, positively curdled the blood in his veins, "harrowed up his soul."

His thoughts naturally traveled to his chum. What fate had befallen Dick? Oh, how sincerely he wished now he had been able to keep up with the latter, and share it, whatever it was.

Even death, in its most dreadful form—by being torn to pieces by wild beasts or speared or clubbed by savages—by the side of his gallant brother-apprentice, did not seem now anything so horrible to contemplate as living amongst these black monsters, with only this woman, steeped in probably every species of crime—a murderess herself now, by her own admission, in intention, if not already in fact. several times over—to speak to, to associate with.

Dick Selwyn was dead, he despairingly reflected. He believed that his chum would not have deserted him otherwise—would have come back to him, and, finding him a prisoner about to be roasted and eaten by his cannibal captors, have attempted some desperate move to try and scare off the savages and so save him.

Ah! Possibly his gallant chum *had* come back, while

he was unconscious, had made some such effort at rescue, been chased and, in trying to escape again, fallen over the edge of the cliff into the sea! That death would account for his body not being amongst the others reserved for the horrid feast.

The more he thought over the matter the more poor Tom was led to think that this was the solution to the problem, and, as we know, he was not altogether wrong.

After sailing on for some hours, the flotilla of canoes, following the lead of the queen's own craft, turned shoreward and their crews beached them on the golden sands. Then a rude encampment was formed, the warriors building a number of bowers or "breakwind" shelters without any roof, of rushes and branches of trees.

The queen's palanquin was enclosed apart by four of these breakwinds, and covered in such a manner as to secure for her complete privacy. Tom's litter was screened in in like manner, and the lad guessed from these preparations that the savages meant to pass the night there, though it was not yet midday.

The lad had already broken his fast aboard the canoe, while Señora Balta was telling him her dreadful story. He had been given some cold roast pork—pigs it appeared abounded in the island—cooked yams, and "taro" roots, as well as a coarse kind of bread, followed by a luscious guava, and a banana or two.

After building the huts the natives sat down to dine,

some of the most highly-prized delicacies consisting of snakes, rats, caterpillars, and the like. Needless to say Tom did not partake of that kind of food. At the White Queen's request he sat apart with her in front of her "bower," and ate of properly cooked pork and goat's flesh, yams, and the native bread, washed down by draughts of clear, cold water from a spring near.

"Señor Merritt," she said, during the meal, "we are not going on to-night to the native village. We are going to stop here until to-morrow morning. Then we are going to make forced marches right across the island to the former site of the treasure, the spot which Alvarez and his new friends will come to. If he has not come yet, I will wait for him. If he is there already, so much the better. We shall wait here till morning so as to permit of an even larger band of my warriors joining me. See yonder! my bodyguard are signaling the village for the desired reinforcement."

Tom looked in the direction she indicated, and saw four great columns of thick, black smoke ascending above the trees. Even as he looked, the two middle columns vanished, then in their place two great inky clouds shot up, like the puffs from a giant locomotive. Then two more, another two, and yet two more, the columns on either side still steadily ascending without a break.

Finally, the middle columns once more rose, unbroken, beside them into the air.

"That is the native method of communication. They can signal to one another by it, though miles apart," the woman added in explanation, seeing Tom's blank look of astonishment.

CHAPTER XI

ENTOMBED ALIVE!

WE will now follow the adventures of Dick Selwyn for a time.

Needless to say, he was not killed by his fall down the chasm. The hero of a novel never meets with so untimely an end, for, of course, if he did the novel, too, would meet with the same fate. For obvious reasons one cannot exist without the other.

Down the black void he had plunged, to souse deep into icy-cold water at the bottom, and he instantly whirled away by a furious torrent, a mad vortex of seething, hissing foam.

Ere he could collect his scattered wits, much less make a struggle to gain the surface, there came a terrific rush and a roar like continuous thunder, and he felt himself shooting at lightning speed along a narrow underground tunnel. At least such he afterwards knew it must have been, though at the time he was perfectly incapable of forming any idea of where he was or making the slightest attempt to learn.

Both his arms were held firmly to his sides, as if bound by iron bands, with the resistless force of the current, which also fortunately kept him fixed in its

middle; otherwise he must have been dashed to pieces against the rocky walls or roof.

He had the presence of mind to close his mouth tightly and hold his breath. Although the impulse to gasp for air was well-nigh maddening.

It seemed hours to him that he was thus swept along at the speed of a mill-race, but probably it was only a minute or so at most. How he retained his senses through it all, he never afterwards could really understand.

On he was shot in a perfectly horizontal position, deafened by the thunderous roar, half-stunned, and wholly bewildered, gulping down mouthful after mouthful of the water now in spite of himself, suffocating—drowning.

His senses were leaving him; he felt he must gasp for breath. All at once he rose in a mighty, eddying swirl to the surface, and instinctively gasped in a life-giving mouthful of air. He saw above him the high rocky roof of a mighty cavern, dimly lighted, like some old cathedral, by the moonlight, which streamed in meteor-like beams through innumerable cracks and rifts overhead.

Struggling desperately to the nearer bank, he contrived to clamber on to a shelf of rock overhanging the flood which had widened considerably and so lost much of its velocity.

He murmured a prayer of heartfelt thankfulness to that Providence to Whose mercy he owed his safety.

It was indeed a miraculous escape, for he might have been killed or maimed by the fall alone from the height.

But where was he?

Inside the bowels of the earth evidently, beside some wonderful subterranean river.

How was he going to get out?

The brain-numbing, limb-paralyzing thought occurred to him that he might be unable to—that he might be practically entombed alive. But he put this dreadful fear from him manfully, and looked around searchingly for an outlet.

It would be utterly impossible for him to clamber up to any of the fissures in the roof, and he doubted, even if he had possessed the means of reaching them, whether he could have squeezed himself through the largest of them.

The sight of the blessed rays that penetrated the cavern, however, filled him with hope presently. He knew only a thin layer of rock could intervene between him and the outside world.

Were he to follow the course of the flood he might find some outlet, some such hole as that he had fallen down in the first instance.

He felt, too, he ought to be deeply grateful that he was not buried in Cimmerian darkness, as he might have expected to be.

By the half light that pervaded the place he quickly made out that the ledge on which he stood ran the whole length of the cavern, disappearing with the

stream inside a low, pitchy-black arch that clearly led into another cave or gallery.

From this he was inclined to think that he might be able to walk along the rocky bank of the torrent until he emerged with it into the open air somewhere in the interior of the island.

How far underground he had come he had not the faintest notion, but he believed he had traveled at the rate of fully a mile a minute through that awful tunnel, and he shuddered again as he recalled the horrors of that passage.

Now the young fellow's thoughts flew to Tom Merritt. What had become of *him*?

A feeling of unutterable anguish surged over Dick's noble heart at the reflection that his brother-apprentice must have fallen either by or into the hands of the merciless savages at the time of his own fall down the chasm.

Never again, he reflected, would he see his brave chum, that chum who had become more endeared to him than any brother by their mutual load of suffering and privation, by their mutual joys and hopes and perils, by all they had so nobly gone through together, side by side. Never again would he hear Tom's voice, or have the consolation of the latter's company in this dreadful Crusoe-like, cannibal-haunted existence.

"Oh, why—why did I not go back in search of him—go back and share his fate, whatever it was?" he groaned.

Then—then out of his black despair a voice seemed to whisper to him that perhaps after all Tom was not dead or carried off by the Papuans—that his chum had also in some way managed to elude these and escape in the forest.

This thought inspired Dick with fresh hope and almost strength—a desire to get out of that underground cavern and go in search of his comrade.

Despite his still aching limbs and head, he got upon his feet, and, steadying himself with one hand against the rocky side of the cavern, began to pick his way cautiously along the broken and rugged ledge, which was slippery with slime and dank moss, and very narrow in places.

He had to use extreme caution in negotiating these corners and cling tightly spread-eagle fashion to the projecting buttress of rock alongside, for a slip or a misstep would have precipitated him into the torrent again.

At the low-arched mouth of the tunnel he halted, loth to leave the twilight of the cave and penetrate the dark, forbidding depths that lay beyond. His mind shrank in horror from the thought of exploring them, facing their unknown perils in inky darkness—as well it might.

Only too well did he realize he might go wandering on and on along those Stygian galleries without ever finding an outlet—lost in their horrible labyrinth, literally shut up in a living tomb.

And this was not the worst danger to be dreaded. Another fall into that black flood beside him, and, if he ever did reach the open air and the outside world again, it might only be as a drowned, battered, mangled shape.

The very thought of meeting either doom was enough to unnerve the stoutest heart, and for long enough Dick—small blame to him—could not bring himself to enter that pitch-dark tunnel.

But presently he noticed with dismay that the light was beginning to fade even where he stood.

In desperation he determined to explore the tunnel. He felt he might as well meet the darkness there, as wait for it to overtake him where he was.

Still, for all that he groped his way only some yards into the tunnel, to return overcome with horror at the thought of falling into the torrent again, or losing himself in some inextricable labyrinth of rocky caves and galleries enshrouded in eternal darkness.

Full half a dozen times did he thus hesitatingly enter the black depths and return, feeling he could not go on.

As he realized though that his sole hope of deliverance lay in doing so, he at last called all his courage to his aid. Praying for help and strength to that Omnipotent Being who had already in His infinite mercy and goodness brought him through so many awful dangers, he plunged into the tunnel yet once more, determined to keep on this time in defiance of his almost superstitious terror and abhorrence of it.

CHAPTER XII

THE SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLE

STRONG in his fresh resolve, Dick Selwyn pressed forward, though the darkness rose up around him like a solid wall, and he was unable to see an inch of the way. He felt he was only seeking a miserable and horrible death, but he struggled along desperately.

He had to grope his way, of course—grobe it step by step, with both hands and feet. Every moment he dreaded tripping over some unevenness in the precarious path, bumping against some boulder or projection in the rock, or stumbling down a hole and being precipitated into the torrent alongside.

But no such misadventure befell him, though more than once he knocked his head rather badly against the low roof, and presently had to bend double and crawl along on his hands and knees, the passage lowered to such a degree. He began despairingly to fear he would be unable to proceed much further.

After about thirty more feet of this mode of progression he became sensible of a dull, roaring noise!

Believing it to be that of some subterranean cataract into which he might walk in the impenetrable darkness that surrounded him, he was fearful of advancing an-

other step, when, peering forward, he fancied he saw a gleam of light.

It was no fancy—it was a light shining on the surface of the flood!

Hoping against hope that it entered through some aperture that would enable him to regain the world without, he crept on again more eagerly, and came to a sort of tunnel in the rocky side of the tunnel, sloping upwards into the bright moonlight—for such he concluded the soft effulgence thirty feet above him was.

The funnel sloped sufficiently to permit of his clambering up. And this he at once proceeded to do in frenzied haste and ineffable joy, murmuring brokenly, as he climbed and scrambled up the rocks, his gratitude to Heaven.

But his hopes of deliverance were dashed to the ground again as suddenly as they had been raised.

Scrambling over the lip of the funnel, he found himself, not as he had fully expected, in the open air on the side or crest of some hill or rock, but in a vast cavern, *faintly illuminated by innumerable lamps, consisting of curiously shaped shells burning a sweetly aromatic oil, and suspended from the lofty, vaulted roof!*

The next minute Dick Selwyn had forgotten his bitter disappointment in amaze at his surroundings.

Before him, on a sort of altar-stone or pedestal, approached by three broad, low steps, stood a life-sized statue of some saint. It appeared to be of solid gold,

and had a halo of precious stones—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires—that flashed and scintillated in a thousand coruscations of dazzling rainbow hues in the lamp-light.

Long stalactites of the wildest and most beautiful formations adorned the walls and ceilings of this remarkable cave, and also reflected in numerous radiant colors the rays of the lamps.

It would have needed but little aid from the imagination to see in them here mighty organ pipes, there cascades frozen midway in their fall, fairy palaces and colonnades, or delicate, lace-like curtains; or yet to have peopled all these wonders of the subterraneous world with gnomes and elves and sylphs and hobgoblins.

Dick Selwyn looked about him, as well he might, in utter surprise. But his gaze soon traveled back from the fantastic stalactites around to the gorgeous statue upon the pedestal in the center of the floor.

That statue must have come from some Catholic country.

“Ha!” He started violently. “Sure as anything it is a portion of the vast treasure stolen from Lima by Alvarez, the Peruvian seaman, and his former confederates,” he gasped.

“That double-dyed ruffian told nothing but the truth after all!”

And this island to which he (Dick) and Tom Merritt had been drifted by fate was the very one on which

the treasure had been buried by the pirates—to which the mutineers of his old vessel, the *Albatross*, were now bound.

For several minutes the apprentice was too bewildered and surprised to do more than stare at the valuable image. Then he asked himself wonderingly how on earth it came to be where it was on that pedestal, which had, without the shadow of a doubt, been specially built for it.

A light presently came to him.

The savages! They had found the treasure and erected the statue here, worshiping it as a fetish or idol!

Without a doubt that was the true solution of the mystery. And, as he came to this belief, Dick was seized with unspeakable dismay. What if the savages should come and find him trespassing there?

He must hasten at once to escape from it. This should not be so very difficult. There must be another entrance and exit from the cavern besides that dreadful one he had come by—besides that funnel up which he had just climbed and which yawned immediately behind the golden image, or “fetish.”

“Of course, there must be! The Papuans sure never came by that funnel.”

In frantic haste, eager to fly from a scene which might be visited at any moment by some of the savages, Dick rushed to the nearest wall, and, gliding behind

the curtain-like stalactites, began searching for an outlet.

The mysterious, dull roar he had heard before was also audible here. But it was not so loud, and, as he passed in and out of the fairy-like colonnades and other fantastic stalactites, he presently was startled and horrified to hear above it, growing louder and ever louder, a weird, unearthly chant as of many human voices.

Had he been superstitious he might have imagined it was the goblin-sprites and elves who inhabited those wonderful underground palaces singing, but Dick guessed at once it was the attendant priests of the "Golden Fetish" coming to pay it their usual devoirs.

Thrilled through with unspeakable alarm, he looked wildly round him, like some hunted animal, not knowing which way to turn. He saw just ahead of him no less than three large, arched tunnels in the side of the cavern.

The chant appeared to proceed from the middle one, and, even as he hesitated which to choose, he saw a bright red light issue from it. With a noiseless rush he gained the dark mouth of the nearest adjacent tunnel. And there he waited, secure in its deep shadow from discovery, with as much curiosity now as fear to see what and who these new-comers were.

In another minute some score of the most hideous and extraordinary-looking apparitions filed out of the adjacent tunnel. They were men, of course—native priests, or "fetish-men"—but any one might have been

excused for thinking he was the victim of a nightmare, for they were clad, all but the legs, in leaves worked into weird and strange shapes, with outrageously high and grotesque feather head-dresses, not unlike the famous Duk-Duk dancers of New Britain.

Each carried two blazing torches, to the imminent danger of one another in their costumes of leaves and feathers, and all were chanting their weird chorus.

Dick Selwyn watched them extinguish their torches at the mouth of the tunnel and pile them there, all but the last man, who stuck his still alight, into a sort of sconce hollowed out of the rock.

The instant the procession had moved on and was hidden from him by the intervening stalactites, the daring young apprentice slipped quickly up to the blazing torch, snatched it from its sconce, and with it as noiselessly darted into the middle tunnel.

Down this he hurried with all possible speed, holding the torch above his head so as to throw the light well ahead of him and so guide his footsteps.

The passage he was now traversing was clearly partly the work of Nature, partly the work of man. Upon the walls and floor it was easy to trace the marks of chisels or similar tools.

He soon came to where two lateral passages branched off the main one, but he stuck to this and passed them by, only, however, to reach a perfect network of rocky galleries and chambers ramifying away in every direction.

Taking one at haphazard—as he could only do—he followed it for a considerable distance. But there seemed to be no end to it. It wound on and on, with other caverns, natural or otherwise—he was too exhausted and horrified now to notice or care—crossing and branching off it at every turn.

His torch was almost consumed, when, to his great joy, he found a quantity of dried twigs and brushwood littering the rocky floor of one of the caverns. He quickly made half a dozen more torches with them.

Probably they had fallen down through the wide gaps that occasionally occurred in the lofty roof, and through which he could catch tantalizing glimpses of the starry heavens.

Oh, heavens! would he never reach an outlet to the upper and outer world? He must have lost his way—taken the wrong turning.

“Those Papuan priests never came this way,” he groaned aloud.

But he kept doggedly on, desperately fighting against exhaustion, hoping against hope he would presently come to the end of the fearful maze.

Scarcely able at length to drag one foot after the other, he became a prey to the uttermost despair, the most horrible imaginings. He felt he was inextricably lost in that subterranean labyrinth—entombed alive in those awful caverns. “I may be doomed to go on wandering through them until death from starvation or raving madness overtakes me,” he gasped.

He had often heard of hapless beings who had been lost underground in similar caverns to the one he himself was in, and how their skeletons had been found, covered with stalactites, years after.

And yet they presented now at every step scenes exceeding the wildest pictures of enchantment, and baffling description.

Petrifactions of the most novel and elegant appearance—giving the idea of their being lighted up with fairy glass chandeliers as they shot back the rays of the torch in countless varied and magnificently hued flashes—crowded thick and fast upon one another, hanging pendulous from the roof and walls. Here and there the shadows dancing in and out made the glistening rocks look like enchanted men—gnomes and genii.

Dick Selwyn struggled on and on through the apparently interminable string of halls and chambers and passages in a state now bordering on frenzy. At times he would scream and shout at the top of his voice, and even kick and beat wildly at the stalactites and stalagmites.

He was on the point of flinging himself down upon the rocky floor in the utter abandonment of despair, when, as he turned a sharp angle in the gallery he was following, he beheld a faint crimson light glimmering ahead.

“Ahoy! Ahoy! Help! Help!”

Utterly reckless from his awful experience, caring little at that moment whether friends or foes were be-

fore him, he shouted like a madman, staggered eagerly forward, and, turning another corner in the rocky wall, found himself in a spacious cavern opening on the sea-shore.

Through its wide-yawning mouth he saw the blessed sight of the open sea shimmering like quicksilver in the glorious moonlight. A cool fresh breeze, laden with ozone, fanned his heated face, and he drank it in greedily, eagerly, as he stumbled forward.

But the scene we have pictured was incomplete.

In the middle of the cave crackled and blazed a great wood fire, and all around it in various attitudes of startled horror and dismay, gripping their weapons ready for use, stood seven or eight white men! Simultaneously as his eyes rested upon them, Dick recognized them. They were Carker, Alvarez, and others of the mutineers!

CHAPTER XIII

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE

It was too late for Dick Selwyn to retreat, even had he had a mind to. The instant he appeared in view the mutineers with cries of astonishment covered him with their rifles.

He staggered forward, and fell fainting at the ex-mate's feet.

That unworthy leaped back as if he had been shot, emitting as he did so a howl of superstitious terror.

"It's Selwyn's ghost! It's one of the boys kim back from the grave to ha'nt us," yelled Seth Pottle, the British seaman; and a wild stampede ensued, every one of the panic-stricken miscreants, including even Carker, with horrified cries, tearing out of the cave.

They fully believed they had to do with a visitant from another world—the specter of one of the apprentices they had so ruthlessly consigned to the tender mercies of wind and wave.

Garcia, tripping over an unevenness in the rocky floor, measured his length upon it, and there he sprawled, groveling spread-eagle fashion, and shrieking for mercy in childish terror.

Carker and Alvarez were the first of the gang to get

over their superstition and guilty fears. They halted at the cave-mouth and looked back.

Their courage revived when they saw the supposed ghost lying helpless and apparently lifeless upon the ground. Realizing that after all they only had to deal with flesh and blood, and not a being of another world, they gingerly returned, and bent down and examined Dick, who had swooned.

"Come back, you fools," shouted Carker then. "He's no ghost, but human flesh and blood. It's the boy himself in the flesh."

At this Garcia scrambled up in a white heat at the exhibition he had made of himself, and the others stole back, still somewhat fearfully, one by one.

"This is Selwyn right enough. How in thunder did he get here? Quick, men, torches! Merritt must be in hiding somewhere at the back of the cave, too. Let us explore it and find him."

Some of them seized blazing brands from the fire and started to search the further depths of the cavern. But needless to say their search was futile, though they penetrated some little distance into the labyrinth.

"He's fled further back, I suppose, and we can never hope to find him in this perfect maze," growled the ex-mate at length. "Let him go! A man might lose himself and starve among these endless caverns. Selwyn appeared to be at his last gasp. He must have been, or he would never have shown himself to us."

They returned to the cave opening on to the shore,

guided by the shouts of their comrades there, and once more gathered in a group around the senseless Dick.

"Fetch a bucketful of water, one of you," ordered the mate. "We'll bring him round and make him talk. Ten thousand furies! Is it possible he and Merritt found the treasure and hid it somewhere else?"

And he looked round eagerly at his confederates.

"*Caramba!* Eet ees posseeble," growled Alvarez, with kindling eyes; "but eet doesn't seem probable."

"Guess it wouldn't seem probable the younker 'ud reach this hyur island, cast adrift in a small boat, with no compass, oars, or even a knowledge of its location, eh?" put in Seth Pottle, who often affected Yankee slang.

"You're right. If the one happened, the other might," agreed Carker. "Well, we'll soon know. I'll have the truth out of him if I have to flay him alive. Give me the bucket!"

The scoundrel dashed the pailful of water into the senseless lad's face with the desired effect. Gasping and spluttering, Dick unclosed his eyes upon the ring of grinning, truculent faces.

"Now, my young fellow," cried Carker, roughly, "get the cobwebs out of your brain as quick as you like, and answer my questions. Hark you, let's have the truth, or it will be the worse for you. Now, first, where's your mate, Merritt? Where's he got to?"

"I don't know," gasped poor Dick, in a husky whisper, speaking with extreme difficulty in his exhausted

and famished condition. "We were chased by savages and—and I fear they must have killed him. Water—food, for pity's sake! I—I am starving!"

"Savages, eh!" ejaculated the mate, in surprised alarm. "There are none on the island—at least, not so far as we know. Here, take a swig of this! That ought to put fresh life into you; then you will be better able to tell us your story."

He pulled a bottle of whisky from his pocket, and, uncorking it, poured some of the fiery liquor down the boy's parched throat.

Dick was seized with a bad fit of coughing, and nearly choked, whereupon Seth Pottle held a glass of water to his lips. The boy drank eagerly of this, and the life-giving, refreshing fluid revived him greatly.

"Now, then, get along with your yarn," ordered Carker, fiercely. "What about the treasure? What have you done with it? You've hidden it somewhere else, we know."

"I—I haven't done anything of the kind. I—I know nothing of the treasure."

"None of your infernal lies, now! You found it in that cave at the back there, just where Alvarez and his friends concealed it, and you've carried it away bit by bit and hidden it somewhere else—probably enough deeper in the labyrinth. Come, now; you'll find it will pay you best to tell the truth. Out with it!"

"Believe me, I never saw the treasure, and know

nothing about it—nothing beyond one statue that I came across by accident.”

“Aha! I thought we’d come to it,” crowed the villain triumphantly; and the others crowded closer round with eager, expectant faces and glistening eyes.

“Give me something to eat first. I’ve been wandering about all night in that horrible labyrinth.”

The mutineers eagerly produced some cold meat, bread, and wild fruits, and the famished lad was speedily demolishing this to him most delectable fare.

They did not suffer him long to eat in silence, however. Carker, Alvarez, and Garcia, seating themselves on fragments of rock beside him, shortly began again eagerly plying him with questions.

“Tell us while you eat,” said the first-named. “What was that you were saying about a statue you’d found by accident?”

Amid frequent interruptions and surprised and half incredulous exclamations from all the other mutineers, Dick related in brief his and Tom Merritt’s adventures since they were cast adrift in the small boat, and what befell himself after his fall down the chasm in the forest.

The mate listened with growing impatience, and at last broke in angrily with:

“Enough of this old woman’s yarn! You are lying, you infernal young imp! Don’t think you are going to get over me with such a tale. It’s one tissue of lies, I know it! You and Merritt have hidden the treasure

somewhere. By the powers, I'll have the truth out of you!"

And he caught Dick fiercely by the throat, almost choking the boy, who was in the act of swallowing another mouthful of food.

"Tell the truth, you young swab!" vociferated the enraged mutineer. "Tell the truth, or I'll strangle you!"

"I—I am telling the truth," gurgled Dick, helplessly.

"You're not! There are no savages on this island. Alvarez assured us there weren't."

"Hold on, boss! some may have come along since," Pottle was beginning in an expostulatory tone, when there came a terrific yell at the mouth of the cave. Then in at it burst a cloud of whooping, screeching, naked savages—or rather leaf and feather-bedecked ones—brandishing ugly-looking spears, clubs, and stone axes.

All was confusion—pandemonium on the instant. Taken completely by surprise as they were, the mutineers were incapable of offering adequate resistance, and were all promptly speared or knocked down, stunned and bleeding, by their agile and muscular foes.

Dick Selwyn fell to the floor half choked as Carker let go of him, and, before he could struggle up, the latter's senseless and bleeding body fell heavily across him, followed by that of Seth Pottle, so that now the unfortunate lad was almost crushed to death by their dead weight.

The savages, who from their leafy costumes the boy concluded were some of the priests or "fetishmen" he had seen in the subterranean temple, danced and yelled in delight over their triumph. Then, at an order from one of the oldest amongst them, they began to examine the bodies of the fallen mutineers.

Three of these, who had been killed by spear-thrusts, were immediately decapitated by the ferocious fetishmen, and their heads stuck on lances. The others then, as well as Dick Selwyn, had their hands tied behind their backs with grass-ropes.

Carker, Alvarez, Garcia and Pottle were among the survivors, and the first two mentioned still lay senseless from the knockdown-blows they had received. The Britisher, the half-breed and the other two mutineers—one of whom was the negro cook of the *Albatross*, Jake Golightly by name, and the other a Swede named Slisberg—were more or less badly wounded with spear thrusts and tomahawk cuts.

Their savage captors, however, to their exceeding astonishment, hastily stanching and dressing their wounds.

Forming round the prisoners and the fire then in a large ring, the fantastic-looking priests danced frantically round and round, waving their ghastly trophies—the severed heads—in the air, passing the spears holding these round the entire circle, and uttering the most terrific yells.

At length they ceased their dancing, and, massing

round the prisoners, dragged these to their feet and goaded them with none too gentle pricks and prods from their spears from the cave on to the beach.

Some of the band went before with torches they had lighted at the fire, and the rest brought up the rear, carrying the corpses on improvised litters.

Up a steep and winding pathway scaling the precipitous cliffs the fetishmen urged their prisoner with blows and spear-pricks, so that those unfortunates were more dead than alive when the summit was reached.

Poor Dick Selwyn had fallen before they were half way up, and the hoary high priest had uttered a guttural order to some of his subordinates, whereupon they made another litter and carried him on it, bound down tightly to prevent his slipping off in those places where it had to be held by its bearers in almost a vertical position.

The cliffs scaled, the Papuan priests conducted their captives deep into the forest, and up a broken and rugged defile between two hills to a well-wooded plateau or table-land, which seemed to extend the whole length of the island.

After about another half-hour's tramping the party came to a large leaf-thatched hut surrounded by a high stockade. Passing through a gateway, which was opened from within by a couple of priests who appeared without any summons, all entered the great hut.

This the white men guessed at once was a temple or Tambu-house. They were not afforded time to take

stock of the interior, but were conducted up to a large yawning hole, or open trapdoor, in the floor, and down a long flight of steps, hewn out of the solid rock, into a great underground cavern, the roof of which was supported by wooden pillars or stakes.

Each of the prisoners was placed in a sitting posture on the rocky floor, with his back to one of these pillars, to which he was securely lashed with withes. Then their captors, singing a weird, monotonous chant, left the cavern by the stairway again, returning to the hut above. The trapdoor was shut down upon the prisoners, and they were left to their own gloomy reflections and the inky darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

A HORRIBLE DOOM

How Dick Selwyn lived through the remainder of that awful night he hardly knew himself. He believed, though, he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion the best part of the time.

The mutineers from time to time exchanged remarks, speculating fearfully upon the fate they were being reserved for.

Was it for some cannibal feast or to be offered up as sacrifices to the idol these people worshiped? One and all, and especially Carker, loaded Alvarez with bitter reproaches for having brought them to this pass, for having lured them to their deaths by his treasure story.

"Curse you for a sallow-faced Dago!" groaned the ex-mate. "I wish now I had never listened to you and joined you in your vile scheme."

"How am I to blame?" asked the Peruvian, piteously. "The island was not inhabited when I was here before. At any rate, we saw no savages. You should have kept a better look-out—posted some one on the watch—and then we might have escaped to the schooner in time."

"Wonder what the four swabs aboard 'll do—if they know what's happened us? Reckon they don't," said

Pottle; "and, moreover, it's to be hoped they won't l'arn, or the mean skunks 'll cl'ar out to a dead cert—sail slick off, I guess, and leave us to our fate."

How long they had been in their prison they had no means of knowing, but it must have been several hours, when they were startled to hear a great tumult overhead—the beating of drums and tom-toms, the blowing of conches, and the frenzied shouts of a great multitude.

The din continued for some time, and then abruptly ceased. There was a lengthy interval before the great trapdoor above them was opened, and there appeared, descending the stairs behind, the old high priest, *a white woman and a white youth!*

All the amazed, startled prisoners recognized the latter—he was Tom Merritt—only two of them the former, who, of course, our readers will have guessed was Dolores Balta, the White Queen of the Papuans.

But those two—Alvarez and Garcia—fell back against the stakes to which they were bound, with cries of incredulity and superstitious terror commingled. Then the power of speech seemed to desert them, and they sat, with eyes starting almost from their heads, with dropped jaws, ashen-hued faces, and looks of unutterable fear and consternation.

The high priest carried a torch, the light of which fell full upon the faces of the captives as well as those of his companions. Behind these came some of the royal bodyguard, bearing more torches.

Recovering from his first shock of surprise at seeing

his dear old chum still alive and in such strange company, Dick Selwyn feebly called:

"Tom—Tom Merritt!"

Tom turned hastily, caught sight of him, and, with a joyful cry, rushed to his side.

"Dick! Dick! Oh, Heaven be praised!"

In another minute he was clasping the chum he had mourned as dead round the neck, and crying and laughing by turns as hysterically, almost as a girl, for very joy.

The high priest looked as though inclined angrily to separate them, but Señora Balta said something to him in an authoritative voice, and he subsided. Without asking the queen's permission, Tom pulled out a knife and cut the withes that bound Dick to the pillar.

Then he began tenderly rubbing and chafing the latter's numbed limbs to restore the circulation of the blood, the while pouring out the story of his own remarkable adventures since their parting, and reassuring Dick they might both safely count on the White Queen's protection.

Dolores Balta slowly advanced towards the panic-stricken Alvarez and Garcia with a grim smile, an expression of truly diabolical exultation upon her handsome face, and gleaming from her large black eyes. The guilty pair gazed at her aghast as she stalked up and stood glowering down at them, the look of vindictive fury and hate intensifying upon her face, her eyes positively seeming to blaze forth fire.

A moment thus she stood, silently, triumphantly surveying them. Then she laughed—laughed long and loudly and madly, her wild, mirthless cachinnation freezing the blood in the veins of the prisoners and Dick and Tom, and awaking numerous elfin echoes from the walls around. The cavern tossed the sounds about, backwards and forwards, to and fro, with a most weird and unearthly effect.

“At last, Miguel Alvarez—at last, Pepé Garcia, we stand face to face again—you and I. You have not forgotten me, I see, though you never expected to meet again in this world the helpless woman you so pitilessly marooned on that barren rock in mid-ocean—the wife of your captain, Pedro Balta, whom you murdered, along with the others. At last I have you in my power, and may wreak upon you all the vengeful hate and fury against you that have been so long pent up in my breast—the passions that have burned the more furiously because it seemed so hopeless to nourish them. But where is the mulatto, Manuel Diaz? I was led to believe he was with you.”

And she looked around her with wolfish eagerness at the face of the other mutineers.

“Diaz, O most noble lady,” whined Carker, who knew sufficient Spanish to understand the purport of what she said, and hoped by affording her the information to propitiate her so far as he himself was concerned—win her good graces and his own life and

liberty at the same time—"Diaz, we left aboard our vessel with three others, in charge of her."

"What!" fairly shrieked the woman, in a perfect frenzy at being robbed, as it were, of one of her longed-for victims. "He is not here? *Mil demonious!* I shall not be thus balked, cheated out of my cherished scheme of revenge. I will have him, too. I will capture the schooner. Dogs!" and she turned and spat upon Alvarez and Garcia in her frenzied rage and hatred. "Tell me—tell me what has become of the others—Nunñez, Castro, Gamarra, Salaverry, Rufino."

"They are dead—all dead, señora," gasped rather than replied the *mestizo*, Garcia. Alvarez appeared incapable of speech with fear.

"May their souls be accursed for ever," screamed the frenzied woman, "and yours, too, ye dogs—ye pigs, when I have worked my will upon you. Would ye know the doom I have decreed for you? Oh, I don't mean to keep you in suspense, or subject you to slow torture. No, I would satiate my vengeance forthwith.

"Listen, dogs! I mean to have you all torn to pieces by orang-outangs.* We have some splendid specimens of the brutes, as big as any to be found in Borneo or Sumatra, or as the largest African gorilla. Ho, ho! It will be a glorious revenge seeing you fighting for your lives with the apes—being torn to pieces by them. It will be a finer spectacle than ever ancient Roman Emperor witnessed in the Amphitheater of Rome!"

* The large, tawny ape, or gorilla, of the East Indian islands.

And, filling the cavern again with her eldritch, mirthless laughter, she turned to her guards and issued some command to them in the native tongue.

The warriors immediately released all the mutineers from the posts to which they were bound, and roughly dragged them to their feet, heedless of their terrified cries and the groans of agony of the wounded amongst them. Then they were hustled towards the stairs and up these into the Tambu-house. There they were received, to their unspeakable terror, with howls of execration and the most hostile demonstrations by a great mob of savage Papuan warriors.

Tom and Dick, filled with awful foreboding and concern for the lives of the hapless mutineers, flew to the side of the White Queen and piteously besought her to show the wretches mercy—not to doom them, villains though they were, to the horrible death she had announced.

She turned like a veritable tigress upon the generous pair, ordering them fiercely to be silent, or they would share the fate of the others.

“Plead not to me to show pity!” she positively shrieked. “As well intercede with a wild beast. After all these years of waiting and vengeful longings I am not to be turned from my purpose now—now, when I have my enemies in my grasp.”

Undaunted, Tom Merritt flung himself on his knees before her and clung to her robe.

“As you hope for mercy yourself hereafter, señora,

show them mercy now. They are *our* enemies as well as yours, but we implore you to spare them. You cannot mean to doom them all—Carker, Slisberg, Pottle and the negro as well—to’—

She shook him off, and strode on after the prisoners and their guards, whispering some words to the priests near. Thereupon these surrounded the two horrified, distressed lads, preventing them again approaching and interceding with her for the doomed men.

Out of the Tambu-house into the bright sunshine the pair were, however, conducted by the fetishmen in the wake of the prisoners and the queen and her savage escort, across the plateau, to a large barren, rocky space.

Here there was a great circular pit dug in the solid rock. It was about fifteen to twenty feet deep, and as large as the arena of a small traveling circus.

Around this the savages massed with ferocious yells of delight, dancing, and capering in their excessive glee at the anticipated pleasurable (?) spectacle. There was a rocky daïs, or platform, at one side on the brink, surrounded by a rude stone throne.

Señora Balta advanced to this and took her seat upon it amidst the enthusiastic yells of her savage subjects, the frantic beat of drums and tom-toms, the tooting of conches and horns, and the clashing of the spears of her guards upon their targets.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE DEATH-PIT

FILLED with unutterable horror and apprehension for the lives of their doomed fellow whites, villains though these were, Dick and Tom suffered themselves to be conducted by their guards to the brink of the pit close to the queen's throne.

Craning their necks over, they saw an arched, cave-like opening in the rocky wall of the pit, closed by an iron grating like the portcullis of a medieval castle. From behind this grating came from time to time harsh guttural roars, mingled with a horrible jabbering, snarling, and growling.

And, looking closer, through the interstices between the bars, the horrified lads made out monstrous, tawny, hairy creatures, like wild men, fighting and wrangling together.

These caged creatures were the orang-outangs or giant apes the White Queen had spoken of, and they were presently to be let loose to work their ferocious will upon the mutineers.

Both boys nearly swooned with excess of horror at the mere thought of the awful scene they were to witness.

On the opposite side of the death-pit were the in-

tended victims, still bound and helpless, and to a man the picture of abject fright.

Not one of them stood erect. Alvarez, Garcia, Slisberg and the negro were groveling on the ground and screaming wildly in their native tongues and broken English, all in a breath, for mercy. Carker and Pottle were on their knees, writhing and struggling in their bonds, their eyes rolling fearfully, their faces ghastly white, and working convulsively, while from time to time crying across in piteous accents to Señora Balta to have mercy on them, to spare them.

But, like the she-devil she was, that unsexed creature sat apparently quite unmoved by the horrid spectacle—a spectacle that might have melted the heart of a stone—nay, rather gloating over it, delighting in the agonies of not only the two men who had wronged her, but also of their ill-fated companions.

A contemptuous sneer curled her upper lip, and a light of malignant glee glowed in her fierce black eyes. Otherwise her face was as stony as that of the Sphinx.

She issued some orders to the headman of her body-guard, and, with a low salaam, he withdrew and told off about a dozen of his command. These started off round the pit to where two strong ropes, attached to the upper part of the grating covering the gorillas' cage, were coiled around a stout stake planted immediately above it.

At the same time the mutineers' guards slipped

noosed ropes over their heads and drew these taut under their arm-pits.

Then one by one the doomed men, in spite of their shrieks for mercy, their desperate struggles and writhings, were launched feet foremost by several pairs of savage hands over the edge of the pit, held suspended there in mid-air for an instant, while another of their captors with a sharp knife slashed through the cords upon their wrists and so freed their hands, and then lowered into the arena.

Alvarez, Garcia and Golightly, the negro, when their hands were freed, clung to the rope, and, on being let down, refused to release it, hoping vainly to be drawn up again with it, whereupon the loose end was tossed down, too.

Carker was the last man to be let down, and the moment the withes fell from his wrists, before the savages holding the end of the rope looped under his arm-pits, could lower away, he swung round, and, clutching hold of the edge of the pit, tried to scramble back on to *terra firma*.

In his face was that which boded no good to the first of his tormentors he laid hands on. The first thrill of ghastly terror at the fate destined for them, so far as he was concerned, had passed away, and all the wild fury of his desperate nature was aroused.

To choke or pommel the life out of one of those exulting fiends was the sole feeling that now possessed

him—to send, at any rate, one of them into eternity before him, that he might not die unavenged.

With shouts of anger the spearmen at once made at him with leveled weapons, but he seized the fellow who had just released his hands by the knife-arm. Before the man could scramble up or back from the edge of the pit, he gave a fierce tug and dragged the unlucky wretch bodily over into the pit with him.

One horrified shriek pealed from the native's lips ere his body, turning a complete somersault in mid-air, struck the sandy bottom of the arena with a thud, distinctly heard by Dick and Tom on the opposite bank.

He lay motionless and silent where he had fallen, in a strained, unnatural attitude. His neck was broken.

His fate caused all the natives holding the rope to let it slip swiftly through their fingers, and Carker descended into the pit with a rapidity that nearly drove his legs up into his body.

Quickly, however, he flung off the noose, and with a glad cry pounced on the knife the savage he had pulled over still nervelessly gripped.

Frenzied yells of rage went up from the assembled multitude at the fate of their fellow, and many of the Papuans caught up stones and began furiously to pelt the ex-mate with them. Several of the missiles struck him upon the head and body, and beat him, bleeding and half-stunned, to earth.

Then one and all the savages yelled for the lives

of the prisoners, and clamored for the orang-outangs to be let loose on them.

Dick and Tom had shaken off the first paralyzing horror.

"Tom," cried the former, "I cannot stand by and see Carker and his companions torn in pieces by those fearful brutes. I must make some attempt to save them, even if it be at the cost of my own life."

"What can we do? What can we do?" wailed Merritt, helplessly. "That dreadful woman, Señora Balta, will never forego her cherished revenge, plead with her how we may. She will not listen to us, but may rather fulfill her threat and cast us also to the apes."

And the lad could not repress a shudder of horror.

"I care not for her threats. She can throw me to the beasts if she likes, but I'm not going to stand idly by and be a witness to so horrid a spectacle. She *shall* listen to me!"

And the noble, devoted youth, his heart full to bursting with pity for the very men who would so lately have put him to death without scruple or one thought of pity—who had twice before attempted it in different ways—suddenly sprang away from his chum's side, and, with flying feet, tore through the crowd of surprised guards and warriors towards the daïs.

The men who had been deputed to look after him and Tom, and prevent them renewing their pleas for mercy on behalf of the mutineers, had had their atten-

tion distracted for the moment from their charges by Carker's desperate move; and so he managed to burst through them before one could stretch out a hand to stay or seize him.

And it was the same with the Papuan warriors. All their attention was riveted upon the wild scene taking place on the opposite side of the pit, and he was past them before they could make a move to arrest him.

Gaining the daïs, he bounded on to it, then flung himself on his knees at the White Queen's feet.

She leaped up in wild alarm, but he held out his hands imploringly towards her, crying, or, rather, panting:

"Señora—señora, spare them! Have mercy on them, as you yourself one day hope to obtain mercy from that Heaven you would outrage and horrify by this hideous massacre—this atrocity. At least—at least," he shrieked, as, at a sign from the queen, several of her guards rushed upon him and seized him—"at least, if your insensate hate and fury against Alvarez and Garcia call for their destruction in this horrible way, spare the others. They, at any rate, never harmed or wronged you. Spare them—spare them, if you still have one spark of womanly tenderness in your fiendish heart!"

Señora Balta's face took on once more an expression of terrible rage, and her eyes again seemed to flash fire.

"You dare to address such language to me—you speak to me like this! You infernal young Yankee

dog, you shall share their fate. Toss him into the pit, guards!" she cried in the native tongue. "Fling him in with the others!"

The guards were about to obey this savage order with evident delight, when her face changed as if by magic, and she screamed out:

"Hold your hands, guards! On your lives, stop! Do not fling him into the arena. All your heads fall, if you do!"

The warriors halted on the instant, and not a second too soon, for they were almost on the edge of the pit, and another swing of their muscular arms would have sent the brave lad hurtling through space, probably to break a limb if not his neck upon the bottom of the arena.

"Hold!" cried the White Queen. "He is too brave to meet with such an end. Señor Selwyn—for that is your name, is it not?—you are indeed brave thus to dare my wrath. You are a brave youth, and I forgive your insolence out of respect for the courage you have displayed. I cannot understand your pleading for the lives of these men, though. Did they not seek your lives?"

"Yes, yes; but with all their faults they are white like ourselves. They were once my shipmates, too. And, oh, the horror of the doom you would send them to—oh, it would sicken me! I could not bear it."

The woman remained silent for a moment. Then she called out, loudly:

"Throw tomahawks into the pit—one for each of the doomed men! Likali, do you hear me? Tell your men to pitch as many tomahawks into the pit as there are prisoners. It will be keener sport watching them do battle on more equal terms with the orang-outangs."

The sub-chief addressed—the same that was at the head of the party casting free the ropes attached to the grating—sullenly repeated his queen's orders. And, one after the other, six of his followers reluctantly drew their tomahawks from their belts, and tossed them into the arena, just in front of the orang-outangs' cage.

Dick Selwyn, released by his captors, sprang to the verge of the pit, and hallooed wildly to the mutineers, who were huddling like sheep around their bolder chief in the middle of the arena:

"Quick, men—over here—over here, and pick up these axes!"

In his deep concern for the wretches, he forgot for the minute where he was standing, and, leaning rather far forward, lost his balance and fell head-first over the edge into the pit!

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE WITH THE ORANG-OUTANGS

TOM MERRITT uttered a scream of horror as he saw his chum go over.

Dick alighted on his hands and knees on the sandy bottom, none the worse for his fall than a slight shaking. He hastily scrambled to his feet, just as the mutineers, led by Carker, came racing across to secure the tomahawks thrown them.

It was too late for Señora Balta to order the warriors hauling on the ropes of the portcullis to desist. This was already half way up in its grooved jambs, and the cave in which the apes were confined stood open.

Out under the raised bars on the instant bounded a couple of the tawny monsters, with shrill dog-like barks. And quickly four more followed them.

They were all full-grown beasts, and of gigantic stature. As they stood mouthing and gibbering and glaring savagely around them, the froth dripped from their horrid gaping mouths and flecked their broad hairy chests.

The mutineers, however, had each secured one of the axes, and stood all together, facing the monsters and anxiously, fearfully awaiting their onslaught.

Even Alvarez and Garcia, seeing nothing before them

but death by the claws and teeth of the fearsome brutes, had pulled themselves together a little, and seemed determined to fight hard for their lives. Their courage was that born of utter despair.

Dick Selwyn alone stood unarmed, but fortunately he was at some distance from the monsters, and the group of mutineers intervened.

"Toss him a rope, quick, for Heaven's sake!" screamed Tom Merritt.

But not a man near him moved to obey. Instead, one or two of the natives leered maliciously in his face, and, with sidelong glances in the direction of that queen whom they held in such deadly awe and fear, grated out something doubtless expressive of their hate for all white persons, and the pleasure it would afford them to see *him* also flung to the apes.

Señora Balta had either not seen Dick take that fatal header over the edge, or else her longings for vengeance upon Alvarez and Garcia—the fiendish desire to see them torn to pieces by the orang-outangs—had made her indifferent as to his fate now, and she was not inclined to interfere with her own enjoyment of the hideous spectacle by issuing orders for his rescue.

The brave youth himself stood for a minute as if palsied with dismay at his awful predicament.

He cast an appealing glance up at the ring of savage exultant faces above him, when—let us hope from some merciful motive—one of the warriors hurled a spear at him.

It struck quivering in the ground within a foot of his body. He immediately pulled it out, and, gripping it firmly, rushed over to where the mutineers stood.

These were already engaged in battling for their lives with the "wild men of the woods," for such is the literal meaning of the word "orang-outang."

With terrific roars that made the rocky sides of the pit resound, the six monsters had no sooner caught sight of their intended victims than they bounded at these, showing their horrid fangs and clawing the air with their muscular forepaws.

Carker was in the forefront of his shrinking companions, the knife in his left hand, the ax in his right. He had braced himself gamely for the impending struggle.

One of the biggest of the awful men monsters made at him. He skipped nimbly aside, and dealt it a terrific slash with his ax just under the ear, laying open its hairy neck and causing it to totter and nearly fall upon all fours. The ax remained buried in the wound, however, and was wrenched out of his grasp.

Quick as thought the ex-mate dashed in under the creature's whirling paws, and drove the knife, with a side-thrust, deep into its heart. Over it toppled heavily with a deep groan, and lay still in death.

Panting with his exertions and intense relief, Carker looked around to see how the others had fared.

Alvarez was lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood, horribly lacerated, while over him stood his

awful antagonist, gnashing its teeth and beating its hairy chest with the frenzy to which its anger had been inflamed by the sight of the blood.

Close by the half-breed, Garcia, was rolling over and over upon the ground in fearful "rough and tumble" with another of the great apes, hewing and hacking at it with his axe, while it bit and clawed with all four limbs madly at him. Both man and brute were streaming with blood and a mass of cuts, gashes, and lacerations.

Pottle, Slisberg and the negro were fleeing from and dodging the other three roaring and snarling orang-outangs around the arena.

Dick Selwyn had halted at the terrifying spectacle, and still stood irresolute, gripping his spear though with the desperate resolve to sell his life as dearly as possible.

The Britisher presently ran directly towards him.

Many a man would have at once turned and bolted off for fear the pursuing monster should transfer its rage to him. But Dick stood his ground, determined to aid Pottle as well as he could.

The latter was still some yards distant when, with a couple of mighty, panther-like bounds, the incensed ape overtook him. Uttering a truly blood-curdling roar, it threw up its immense open forepaw to deal him a crushing blow.

But, in his horror at feeling the beast's fetid breath upon the nape of his neck, at hearing its horrible growls

right in his ear, the seaman stumbled in his stride, and, falling forward, measured his full length upon the ground.

Unable to stop itself with the impetus of its headlong rush, the orang-outang tripped over him and almost turned a somersault upon his back. Rolling over, it was upon its feet, however, with a bounce like an indiarubber ball, almost immediately, and, with its horrid mouth wide agape, it flew at the man.

Pottle, in his extremity, displayed a presence of mind scarcely to have been expected from him after his late exhibition of panic.

He was in the act of scrambling up, but, hastily throwing himself flat upon his back, he let out with both feet together. He had very long legs, and he caught the loathsome brute with them full in the pit of the stomach, doubling it up on the instant like a worm that has been trodden on, and sending it staggering backwards.

Then, quick as thought, he sprang to his feet and faced it with upraised ax as it came at him again.

Adroitly evading its claws, he brought the weapon down with all the strength of his right arm upon its skull. But the thick hair or hard frontal bone turned the blade's edge. And, scarce tottering under the blow, for all the force of it, the monster, with a knock aside of one of its paws, dashed the ax out of its antagonist's hand.

Then, like a bear, it caught him in its hairy arms,

and hugged him against its chest, snarling and growling preliminary to rending him to pieces with its terrible fangs and talons.

That moment was like to have been the sailor's last had it not been for Dick Selwyn, who, seeing his awful plight, dashed forward and thrust the spear deep into the brute's side under the left ribs.

The mighty beast swayed, released the half-fainting Britisher, and with a horribly human-like sob sank in a limp heap upon the ground, dead.

Dick helped Pottle to his feet, and the latter, taking the youth's hand in both his own, panted breathlessly, huskily, and with every symptom of sincere gratitude:

"Selwyn, you've saved my life, I reckon. Seth Pottle's your true friend from this out."

"Look out! look out!" screamed Tom Merritt from above.

The two broke apart and looked fearfully round.

As they did so Slisberg dashed between them, empty-handed. He had lost his axe in his flight.

Close upon him was another ape bleeding profusely from the numerous cuts and gashes the Swede had managed to inflict upon it before losing his weapon.

At sight of three foes the pursuing brute halted, and Pottle hastily dashed at it and almost lopped off one of its paws with a swinging slash of his ax.

He turned and fled back as it charged, bellowing frenziedly, at him, then leaped aside and cut it over

the head with a second backward blow as it lumbered blindly past.

Dick rushed to his succor and wounded it with a thrust in one of the hind quarters. It wheeled sharply on him. But Pottle, now as courageous as he was formerly almost craven, dashed up and cleft its skull open almost to the tusk-like teeth with one mighty trenchant stroke.

It dropped, dying, at his feet, and he and Dick hastily dispatched it with blows and thrusts between them.

Meanwhile Carker, rushing up suddenly behind the monster that had slain Alvarez, had severed with a slash of his ax the tendon of one of its hams—in other words, houghed or hamstrung it so that it was completely disabled.

Golightly, the negro, too, had managed, on getting over his first terrors, being a big, powerful man, to wound *his* pursuer so severely as to cow it, and convert its fury into abject fear. He was driving it before him, and waiting for a favorable opportunity to deal it a fatal blow.

Garcia, the half-breed, lay a mangled corpse under his dying adversary.

The crowd of savage spectators on the brink of the death-pit had been mute up to this, spellbound with stupefied amaze. They now all, however, set up yells of baffled fury and consternation at the victory of the

white men, and the almost total wipe-out of the orang-outangs.

As for the White Queen, she was as much surprised as her savage subjects by the triumph of the prisoners. Her vengeful longings, however, were satisfied by the deaths of her hated fellow-countrymen, Alvarez and Garcia, and she had no grounds for resentment against the survivors.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, she shrieked out to them in her broken English:

"Inside the apes' cave, the five of you, if you would escape the rage of the savages. You'll see a projecting rock on the back wall; push it first to the right of you, and then push it upwards. It will open an outlet into the labyrinth for you."

Carker and the other three surviving mutineers stood for the minute as if they did not comprehend her words; but Dick Selwyn was quick to act upon her advice, and dashed towards the yawning mouth of the cave shouting for them to follow—that escape lay that way.

Thereupon they raced after him, and all five got inside the cavern lately tenanted by the hideous caricatures of humanity they had done battle with—just as the royal guards, not knowing the queen's wishes, and with the intention of cutting off their retreat that way from the arena, cast loose the ropes of the portcullis again. Down this crashed into place, shutting them in.

Slisberg and the negro yelled in terror that they were caught in a trap. But Dick, Pottle and Carker, catching sight, in the dim light of the place, of the projection the queen had described, flew to it and pushed with their united strength upon it to the right.

There was a sharp click, and it moved; then upwards they heaved it frenziedly.

There was another loud click, a rumbling sound, and a portion of the rocky wall moved aside like a sliding-panel, revealing a dark aperture—clearly the entrance to a gallery tunneled in the bowels of the mountain!

CHAPTER XVII

THE WONDERS OF THE GOLDEN FETISH

HASTILY the five men dived inside the opening and hurried along the passage.

At first the daylight outside the cave lit up the way, but this soon faded and they were in darkness. Fortunately the mutineers had matches on them.

Carker struck a couple, and Pottle, even as they continued their flight, pulled off his coat and tore his shirt-sleeves into strips, which he bunched together to form a rude torch.

The rags blazed up brightly and enabled them to get over the ground most rapidly, indeed, at a very run, Pottle dashing on ahead with the flare flaming for over a foot and a half behind him, and filling the place with smoke and sparks.

All knew that the smell of the burning rags must serve to indicate the way they went to their pursuers; but still they must have a light at all hazards.

Fairly racing along the passage, Pottle, with his long legs, keeping easily in the van, the fugitives were soon out of the artificial gallery and amongst the winding, crossing, and intersecting natural caverns of the labyrinth, which apparently honeycombed the entire heart of the mountain.

They kept religiously to what they believed was the main passage, trusting it would conduct them more expeditiously to an outlet on the further side.

From time to time Carker, Dick or Jake, the negro, would halt, and stand in an attentive attitude, anxiously listening for any sounds of pursuit. None reached their ears, so they chased on again after the others with the glad tidings.

Beyond these occasional reassurances very little was said, for all preferred to save their breath to enable them to get along the faster, instead of wasting it in unnecessary conversation.

All the mutineers were filled with astonishment and awe by the beautiful and wildly fantastic scenery of those subterraneous halls, corridors, arcades and colonnades, and the negro was also a prey to the keenest superstitious terror, after the manner of his race when brought in contact with anything they do not understand.

He fancied he saw in the shifting shadows caused by the flare, in the fantastic and grotesque stalactites and stalagmites, and the forbidding rocks and caverns, grinning genii and the most diabolical fiends and gnomes. He kept ever glancing fearfully to right and left of him, and over his shoulder, and his teeth played castanets in his head, while his eyes fairly bulged.

When one rag torch gave out, another was hastily lighted, all the party in turn sacrificing their shirt-sleeves in the common cause.

But still they seemed no nearer the end of the rocky labyrinth. It still kept winding on and on, in and out, round and round.

The mutineers began to get uneasy.

"Let's hark back and try some other way," said Pottle. "This 'ere seems to lead nowhere—only deeper and deeper into the bowels of the mountain."

All came to a halt.

But Dick Selwyn—between whom and his late deadly foes there now seemed to be a tacit and mutual understanding—affirmed he believed their best plan, judging from his former experience, was to stick to one gallery and follow it to the end.

When Pottle and Slisberg agreed with him, Carker could not but give way, if sullenly; and the flight was continued along the same passage.

All at once Jake Golightly, who was ahead with the flare, cried out, "I sees daylight ahead."

The torch was hastily hidden in a cavity, and then all strained their eyes to penetrate the dense gloom before them.

The negro had not been mistaken. A faint ray of light like a star gleamed amid the wall-like blackness far ahead.

With one accord all five men immediately tore quickly—headed by the long-legged Pottle, who had again snatched up the torch—towards that welcome speck of light.

It increased in size with every step, and soon they

were able to extinguish their improvised flambeau, and advance by its twilight-like illumination.

Brighter and brighter the gallery grew, and presently the mouth appeared in view, brilliantly lighted without.

In another minute, though, Dick Selwyn recognized with a groan that the illumination ahead proceeded not from the blessed light of day, as they fondly hoped and expected, but from the subterranean temple—the one containing the golden statue, worshiped by the savages as an idol or fetish.

His companions had dashed on eagerly ahead of him. He quickened his steps, and overtook them as they halted in mute bewilderment and surprise in the mouth of the tunnel at the unexpected scene before them.

Only for a minute or two did the mutineers stand staring stupidly around at the hanging lamps and the gorgeous embellishments of the stalactites. Then, as their eyes rested upon the costly statue on the pedestal in the middle of the floor—flashing back from its golden, glittering surface, its jeweled halo and crown, the rays of the lamps in a myriad coruscations of dazzling, iridescent hues—they one and all started, gasped, rubbed their eyes, stared again, and uttered ejaculations of amazed delight.

The negro was the first to recover from this feeling. Carker was seized with a strange trembling fit at sight of this evidence of the real existence and evident immensity of the treasure he had steeped his soul in blood to possess. Pottle and Slisberg did not seem to compre-

hend yet what the statue meant—that it was part of the pirates' ill-gotten spoil they had come to the island to seek.

With a wild, jubilant yell of "It am de treasyah!" Jake sprang forward, and, clearing the space between him and the statute in a couple of giant bounds, leaped up the steps and clasped it in both arms.

"Dis am my shar'. I claim it fust. I—"

He got no further. There was a loud click, and the statue turned round in his clutch, flinging him violently off. At the same instant the steps of the pedestal sank from under him, and, with one awful shriek of mortal terror and despair, the hapless black disappeared from the sight of his startled companions down a large opening that had appeared as if by magic in the rocky floor of the cavern.

He was gone like a flash of lightning—like the malefactor when the bolt of the gibbet's trap is drawn.

In awful horror his companions stood gazing at the terrible abyss that had swallowed him up for several minutes before one of them could pluck up sufficient courage to approach the brink and gaze down it.

It was evidently of great depth, for far below them they could hear a dull, roaring sound as of a waterfall.

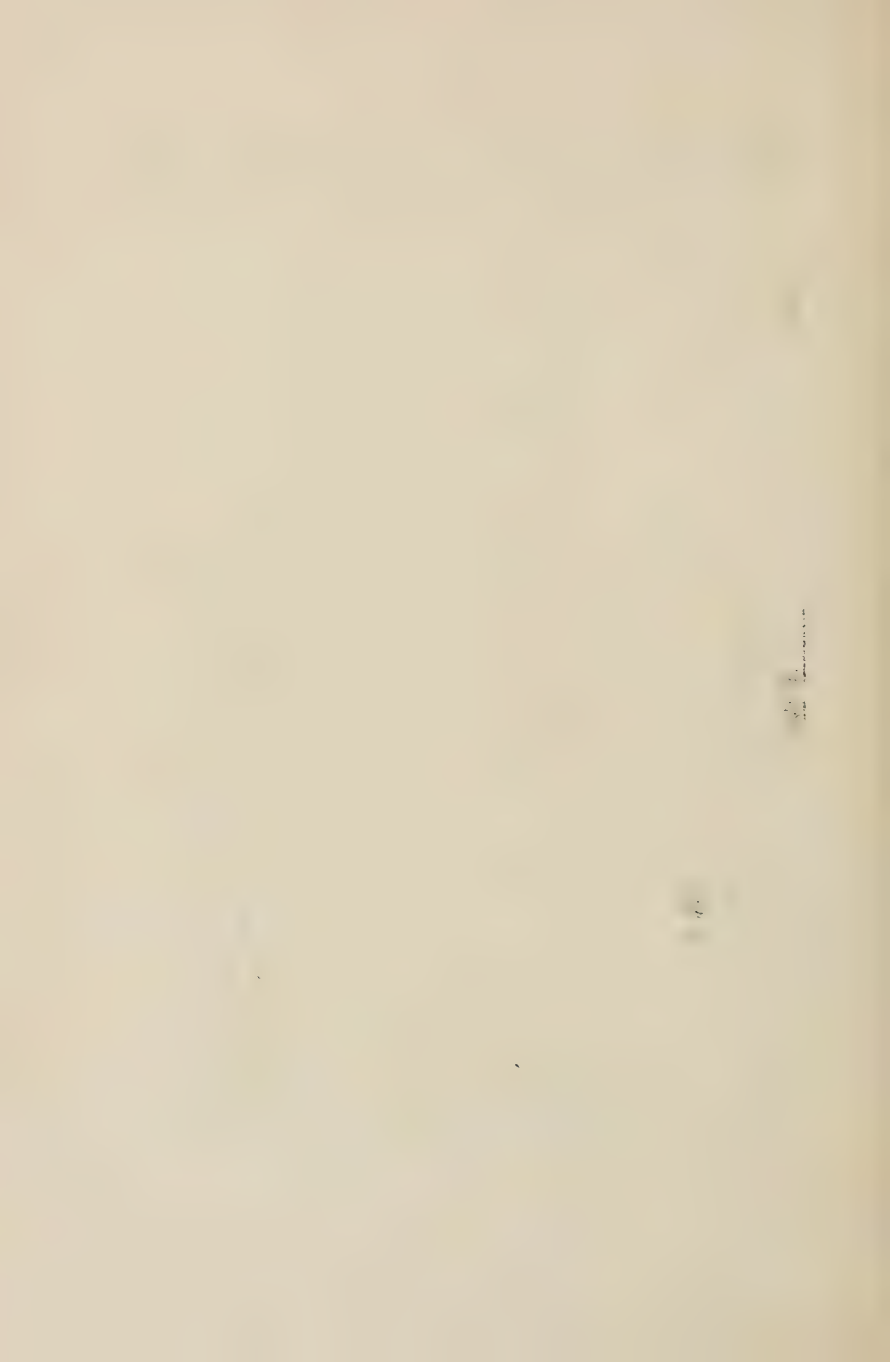
While they were gazing down the fearful gulf, forgetful for the moment of the priceless image that stood before them in contemplation of the end of their black companion, they were startled by the noise of running footsteps behind them.



WITH ONE AWFUL SHRIEK OF MORTAL TERROR, THE
HAPLESS BLACK DISAPPEARED.

"Secret of the Golden Idol."

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Slisberg and Pottle, in their alarm, almost went plunging into the awful pit after Golightly.

Dick Selwyn turned to see, to his immense relief and surprised joy, his chum Tom Merritt flying towards them, while in the mouth of one of the other tunnels which entered the temple stood the White Queen, Señora Balta.

As on the occasion of her first meeting with Tom Merritt, her form from neck to waist was swathed with the clinging folds of live snakes of all sizes, and beside her on the ground wriggled fully half a dozen cobras and huge carpet snakes. The horrid reptiles kept hissing incessantly and darting forth their tongues, while they blinked at the lamplight.

Dick Selwyn and the mutineers stood petrified with surprise and horror at sight of her, and the latter, with gasps of dismay, gripped their stone axes determinedly, resolved to fight to the last before they suffered themselves to be taken prisoners again. They fully expected to see a cloud of Papuan warriors or priests rush out from behind the White Queen and fall upon them.

"Dick, Dick! Thank Heaven we have met you! Señora Balta is once more our friend. She will aid us to escape aboard the schooner."

"*Si* [Yes], I am willing to aid you all still further," the woman called to them, "if you, Señor Carker, as my young friend Señor Merritt has told me your name is, will promise to let bygones be bygones, and forget that

but a short time ago I would have had you torn limb from limb by the orang-outangs. Stay! Remember I had not quite the ordering of matters in my hands. I could not put myself in direct opposition to the wishes of my people and their priests. With them it was an irremissible law to throw to the orang-outangs all strangers caught trespassing in the Sacred Labyrinth, and I risked everything in even directing my guards to throw their tomahawks to you.

"Your escape from the doom decreed you has still more embittered and angered my subjects against me, and so I have come here to make common cause with you—to fly with you and get back to civilization. What is your answer? Is it to be peace or war still between us? Harken! You cannot escape from this labyrinth without my aid. The enraged priests who dwell in and guard the Sacred Labyrinth of the Golden Fetish are even now searching the caverns around for you. I can guide you by the most direct and quickest route to the cove, off which I have reason to believe your vessel is still hovering. What say ye? I ask again. Is it to be peace or war?"

Carker looked at his fellow-mutineers, and read their wishes in their faces.

"I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, and to be friends," he growled. "Only help us to escape from this infernal place," he added, but a little more quickly, "and never fear but we'll give you a free passage aboard the schooner to your native land."

"It is well," said the White Queen, "but beware, my friends, if you attempt any treachery. I shall not trust you very far, and will take my pets with me for my protection. Have no fear, the creatures will not harm one of you if you keep a civil distance from me and them. I am a snake-charmer. I learned the art in my native Peru from my old Indian foster-mother. They will obey my will. Behold!"

She uttered a peculiar, crooning chant, whereupon all the fearsome reptiles crawling over the cavern floor, glided swiftly up to her, and one after another coiled themselves round her arms, as she stooped and fearlessly extended these to them. Thence they crawled about her shoulders, neck and waist, with the others.

A sudden scream-like change in her weird chant, and the loathsome creatures disengaged themselves once more from her, and dropped to the ground again.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TREASURE CHAMBER

THE mutineers and the two apprentices looked upon this strange and uncanny performance with feelings of awe and amazement.

"Now, are you satisfied as to the power I possess?" asked Señora Balta, with a look of triumph. "While ye offer me no injury ye need not fear the creatures will interfere with or attack you. But at the first act of treachery my pets will defend or avenge their mistress. So your fate be on your own heads!

"Now, are ye ready to accompany me? We have wasted quite enough time. The priests of the fetish cannot be very far away, and if we would escape they must not find us here."

"Lead on, señora," said Carker. "We place ourselves wholly in your hands. Assist us now, and you need have no fear that we will attempt any treachery. But, stay! This statue is worth a priceless sum. It is evidently portion of the treasure stolen by Alvarez and his fellows. I am not going back quite empty-handed; I am going to have some of those jewels, at any rate!"

And he rushed round the side of the awful gulf yawning at the feet of the gorgeous image, swinging

his tomahawk. But, without a doubt, the fate of the negro suddenly recurred to his mind, and he halted within a foot or two of the pedestal, and hesitated to step nearer lest the ground should again open and swallow him up, too.

"Hold—hold!" cried Señora Balta, excitedly. "Do not strike that statue as you value your life. If you do you may destroy all chance of our escape from the priests, who are searching for you."

The ex-mate stepped back and dropped his ax.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, paling slightly at the thought that he had perhaps been on the threshold of sharing Golightly's doom in his greed.

Without replying, the White Queen advanced towards the gulf, Pottle, Slisberg and Dick falling back to a respectable distance, as the snakes, twined about her or following her like dogs, raised their heads and hissed menacingly at them.

Halting on the very brink, the woman pointed down into the black depths.

"Down here lies our way of escape," she said. "This abyss is the exit we must make use of if we would not be overtaken by the fetish priests."

All five men stared at her in stupefaction, and believed they had to deal with a madwoman. Surely she had taken leave of her senses.

She read their thoughts in their faces and hastened to continue, in some impatience:

"This is the secret of the statue—of the Golden

Fetish, there. Had you struck the image with your ax, Señor Carker, you might have broken the clever mechanism that makes it revolve on its pedestal and unmask or mask, as required, this pit, down which all who, ignorant of its secret, approach it are instantly precipitated. Down this pit, also, I may tell you, into the fearful flood below, your mangled remains would have been tossed a few hours hence had the orang-outangs, and not ye, triumphed."

The men drew back from the edge of the pit, perhaps involuntarily at this; and even Carker could not repress a shudder at the prospect of what might have befallen them called up by her words.

"But come," went on Señora Balta; "we have no time to lose. Come hither and look down! You see that ladder. If we descend it we will come to another cave immediately under this. You, Señor Carker, are in quest of the treasure looted by the smuggler and pirate, Pedro Balta, and his cutthroat crew, in the harbor of Callao. You will find it in this cavern I speak of. There the treasure—all of it, with the solitary exception of that image—is kept, closely guarded by the priests appointed to watch over it, as the property of this image, which is worshiped by the Papuans as a fetish."

Peeping down the awful pit, the five men now saw what had escaped their eyes before—a series of iron staples fixed in its rocky side just under their feet, and descending into the forbidding depths like a ladder.

"We will descend," said Señora Balta. "Then I will press a spring below that will cause the statue to glide back into place and hide our way of escape. The priests, when they come to the temple, and seeing their fetish intact and in place, will naturally conclude we have not come this way. Now you understand, Señor Carker, why I would not have had you strike the image and perhaps damage the mechanism."

Needless to say, her five companions were filled with admiration and astonishment at the ingenious mechanical skill of a race they had hitherto believed to be amongst the most degraded and untutored of savages.

But the three mutineers, learning that down the abyss lay the road to that treasure they had already sold their souls for—and probably would not have hesitated from doing so again—were now as eager to commence the descent as they had formerly shrunk from it.

Without waiting for the woman's bidding, Carker dropped upon all fours and cautiously, warily, lowered his legs over the brink, while clinging to the topmost staples or rungs. After him went Pottle, and then Slisberg.

Dick and Tom both turned together to the Señora Balta.

"Will you go next, señora, or shall one of us?" they asked her.

"Perhaps I had better," she answered. "The sooner I can mask the gulf again the better. Those Paquan

priests may arrive any minute. But I must not forget my pets."

She uttered her peculiar call again, and the snakes on the floor coiled themselves once more around her arms and shoulders.

She drew them all about her waist, handling the fearful creatures with the utmost fearlessness and familiarity, cooing and murmuring to them all the while, as though they were so many babies she was soothing or lulling to sleep.

The reptiles seemed completely fascinated, and, purring like contented cats, nuzzled their ugly flat heads in her bosom and shut their eyes. It surprised Dick and Tom not a little that she was able to bear the weight of so many of the hideous creatures, but she appeared not to feel this. She twined all her strange pets about her in such a way as not to impede her movements or the free use of her arms.

Then, beckoning to the boys to follow, she knelt down and swung herself fearlessly over the brink of the dreadful pit.

Carker and the other mutineers were already lost to view in the inky depths below. Dick went next, and then Tom, and the descent, perilous enough in all conscience, but as nothing to the boys after their former climbing experiences, was begun.

Clinging tightly to the staples above them, the lads lowered themselves gently and cautiously to one after

the other of those below, feeling about with each foot alternately for the next rung. A false step might have precipitated the unlucky wight headlong into the roaring waterfall far, far below, probably with the person below on the precarious ladder.

Down, down the lads went after the woman, who was now, of course, lost to the sight of even Dick in the impenetrable darkness of the place.

When they had descended about twenty feet, Dick, pausing to gain breath, and whispering to Tom to do likewise for fear of stepping on to him, looked upwards and saw, to his astonishment, only Stygian darkness. He had expected, of course, to see the top of the chasm illuminated by the lamps in the temple.

Instead of that, all was as dark above as around him.

Then the truth occurred to him. Señora Balta had already caused the Golden Fetish overhead to glide back into place and cover the chasm once more. She had probably touched a spring on the way down.

He glanced downwards, and now saw that about fifteen feet below him the chasm was brilliantly illuminated. Against the glare he the next minute saw Señora Balta step on to a small ledge or lip of rock, overhanging an apparently fathomless gulf. From out of the gulf came the roar of the unseen falls.

Hurriedly scrambling down himself, he dropped on to the ledge, and beheld before him the arched entrance

to another vaulted rock chamber like the one they had just left, but considerably smaller.

It was similarly lighted by numerous shell-shaped lamps hanging from the roof and brackets round the walls. The beautiful stalactite scenery of the Temple of the Golden Fetish was lacking, but the chamber contained objects of still greater curiosity and interest even in Dick Selwyn's eyes.

These were small, glittering heaps of precious stones piled up like fruit in corners. Diamonds here, emeralds—some of them as large as pigeons' eggs—there, rubies, amethysts, pearls, sapphires!

And in the middle of the cavern, arranged in separate heaps, too, were gold and silver coins, thousands of them, as well as bars of the same two precious metals, encircling a nucleus litter of exquisitely chased and jeweled gold and silver chalices, crucifixes, crosses and other monastic, as well as private plate, together with several jeweled images, inferior in size and value—though still worth almost a prince's ransom each of them—to the statue worshiped as the Golden Fetish in the temple overhead.

In a sort of inner cave were piled the empty, iron-bound coffers in which the treasure had been shipped and brought ashore by the pirates.

Alvarez and the other two villainous survivors of that ruffian band had not at any rate exaggerated the value of the treasure. It must at least have been worth two millions sterling. It probably was more, for of

course the freebooting Balta had no means of learning the exact figure on account of the plate.

With their eyes dazzled, their senses stunned by such an extraordinary display of wealth, such a treasure as they had never expected to look upon outside their dreams, Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt stood and stared first at the glittering, sparkling heaps, then at one another, then back again at these gorgeous piles.

The three mutineers were temporarily madmen. They were already kneeling by one or other of the irradiant heaps, fingering the gold coins or jewels lovingly, catching them up in handfuls and letting them trickle between their fingers like water or sand.

All three were shrieking in ecstatic delight. For the nonce they were bereft of every ray of superior intelligence. Avarice, greed—the hideous greed of the miser—gleamed from their starting eyes. Presently Slisberg rolled over upon his pile of specie, and positively groveled and wallowed in it.

Señora Balta stood eyeing their actions with unveiled contempt, and a sneer rather than a smile curling her upper lip. She, of all six, was unmoved by the spectacle of that immense wealth. It was evidently no novel one to her.

Of a sudden, resounding above the roar of the falls without, there came the pattering of naked feet on the hard rock.

Dick and Tom looked up in wild alarm, and from out of a tunnel at the opposite side of the cave to that they

had entered by darted about a dozen wild-looking, fantastic, leaf-bedecked figures.

The guardian priests of the Golden Fetish and its cherished treasures were upon them!

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE FETISH PRIESTS WERE ROUTED

WITH screams of frenzied fury the priests, brandish-spears, clubs and tomahawks, were about to rush upon the surprised mutineers and the boys, when the foremost amongst them caught sight of the Señora Balta.

Instantly they cried out in their native tongue:

“Back, back! The White Queen is here! Behold her!”

All the fanatical wretches halted in evident doubt and perplexity, the while the majority, however, eyed her with sullen resentment and suspicion, not unmixed with superstitious awe and fear.

She was equal to the occasion, striding boldly forward in front of the alarmed mutineers, who, forgetting their greed—the gold, everything,—in their terror of these ferocious intruders, had scrambled to their feet and stood nervously gripping their primitive stone axes.

“Back, priests!” she commanded, unflinchingly. “Back, and stay your hands! The white men you see here are now under my protection. I have forgiven them their former sacrilege against the Golden Fetish, and they have consented to become our friends, to fight for us if necessary against any of their kith and kin who may henceforth invade our land.”

There was a surprised murmur among the priests at these words. Then one or two of them broke out into what were evidently indignant and angry protests against her pardoning the white men and taking them into her service.

One tall, ascetic-looking old man, with white hair and bushy eyebrows that almost hid his small, deep-set eyes, stepped forward and began a fierce and impassioned harangue, gesticulating wildly and excitedly towards the five white men.

Señora Balta retorted with equal animation and anger, whereupon the old priest growled out something under his breath that seemed to lash her into a very fury. She took a menacing stride towards him, and all the snakes twined about her raised their heads and hissed.

He stepped back with a startled and vindictive look, and swung back his spear-arm as if about to launch the weapon at her heart.

Immediately she uttered three quick, sharp cries in *crescendo*, and two of the largest cobras coiled about her unwound their rings at once. They dropped to the floor, and, at four more shrill cries from their mistress, hissed angrily and darted straight at the aged fetishman.

He uttered a howl of horror and affright, and turned and bolted with incredible swiftness, for one so old, back inside the tunnel.

The snakes stopped at his disappearance and looked

as though about to transfer their rage to his cowering companions, rearing their ugly flat heads on high, curving their long, slender necks like swans, and blowing out the hoods on their heads to a great size.

Amid a chorus of panic-stricken shrieks, the whole band of fetish priests thereupon broke and stampeded madly after their leader.

Señora Balta uttered her wild, strange cries once more and gesticulated furiously in the direction the fugitives had taken. The cobras appeared to understand her as much as well-trained dogs would. Hissing venomously, they both glided swiftly away in pursuit, disappearing likewise inside the tunnel.

The woman immediately turned to the boys and the three amazed and shrinking mutineers.

"Quick, now!" she cried. "Follow me! My pets will prevent us from being pursued. I have sacrificed everything to a certainty this time for you and your comrades, Señor Carker. I have thrown away by this action, at any rate, all further hope of authority or influence over these savages. I hope you will not requite my sacrifice by any act of treachery when you are clear of this fix."

"Señora, I swear to you I will more than keep my promises to you," replied the ex-mate, with every appearance of sincerity.

"I must trust you," was the woman's rejoinder. Then with one word "Come!" she crossed quickly over to the corners of the cave in which lay the heap of

diamonds, by far the largest heap of any—that is of the precious stones.

Above the pile a huge and hideous gargoyle or fetish's head was carved in bas-relief. The monstrosity was about five feet high by five feet wide and somewhat resembled a monkey's face, but it had great projecting ears, two short horns upon its hairless skull, and two horrid tusks overlapping the lower lip in a horrid grin.

Bending over the heap of diamonds, the White Queen pressed the left eye of the gargoyle-like carving, and immediately the whole carving slid up the face of the rock in hidden grooves, disclosing a low and narrow aperture beneath.

"I am not going to leave all this wealth behind," growled Carker, eyeing the pile of gems, greedily. "At least, I'll have some of these diamonds," and pouncing upon the hoard, he began grabbing up handfuls of the precious stones and stuffing them into his pockets.

"And I, too," cried Slisberg and Pottle simultaneously.

They followed their leader's example, catching up great handfuls of the loose gems and dropping them into their pockets. Heedless were they, in the face of so much plenty, of the glittering streams that trickled like water through their extended fingers, missed their pockets and ran over the rocky floor, for all the world like hail.

"You had better also fill *your* pockets," Señora Balta said to Dick and Tom, and proceeding to do so herself.

"It is no use leaving all this wealth behind, as Señor Carker says. We will find what we can take with us useful when we get back to civilization, and we doubtless will never be able to return and take any more. The guardian priests will see to that."

The apprentices saw the wisdom of her reasoning, and knowing no argument why they should not share in so much wealth going begging, they too started filling their pockets hastily with the diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones, and, moreover, some of the gold coins, without any discrimination or prejudice.

It was a great wrench to the three mutineers to have to leave so much of the treasure behind. And, even after they had stuffed all their pockets to bursting, and could carry no more with ease, they all three must run back, one after the other, and grab a couple more handfuls of the coins and gems.

Dick and Tom and the White Queen were more satisfied with what they had already procured, and, sensible of the extreme peril they ran in lingering in the cave, now turned to resume their flight. At the woman's bidding, the two boys crept fearlessly on their hands and knees through the aperture beneath the upraised fetish's head, and she followed them.

But Carker, Pottle and Slisberg were exceedingly loth to leave that vault of treasure, and though they could not possibly carry another coin upon them, stood

looking covetously, avariciously around them at the wealth they must perforce leave behind.

Señora Balta called again and again to them to come. But it was not until she threatened to go on without them, and leave them to extricate themselves from the labyrinth, that they heeded her, and came with reluctant steps and many lingering, greedy looks back.

The moment the last of their number had crept inside the secret passage, the woman thrust her arm into a cranny in the rocky wall beside her, and pulled a concealed lever which caused the sculptured fetish to drop down and cover the entrance once more.

It was only just at the entrance to the gallery they were now in that they had to stoop or crawl on all fours. The instant they had passed the entrance the roof rose to a sufficient height to permit the tallest of them standing upright.

Impenetrable darkness, however, enveloped them. But the voice of the White Queen bade them all stand still until she got a light.

Then presently, as the men kept silent and expectant, there came the noise of steel striking against flint, some sparks and a spurt of flame illumined the darkness, and they saw the woman lighting a peculiar-looking lamp she had produced from somewhere with some blazing tinder.

Holding the lamp above her head so as to throw its light well before and behind, she now led the way

quickly along the gallery, and the five men hurried after her.

There was scarcely a turn or a twist in this passage. It ran on in almost a perfectly straight line, and the party had not proceeded very far along it before a faint speck of light became visible ahead.

"We are approaching the cave in which the treasure was hidden by Alvarez and his pirate comrades after he had murdered my husband," said Señora Balta. And joyous at the prospect of escape to the schooner, both the men and the lads quickened their steps into almost a run, compelling the woman also to do so.

The cold, refreshing sea breeze was now fanning their heated cheeks; they sniffed the ozone. Brighter and larger grew the light ahead until it was possible to see the end of the passage and the sunlit cavern beyond.

With wild whoops of delight the three mutineers took to their heels and raced forward, quickly outstripping the woman and the two apprentices.

When these last reached the cavern, Dick Selwyn recognized it as the same one in which he had encountered the mutineers, and that had witnessed their capture by the priests of the Sacred Labyrinth.

The exit from the tunnel was artfully concealed behind the confusing array of stalactites that filled up the inner cave, and so it was not likely to be discovered by any one entering the caves from the seashore. The more open gallery by which Dick Selwyn had previously

entered the cave would lead any one not aware of its existence to pass it by.

With one accord the woman and the two lads flew to the mouth of the cave, and looked out in search of the mutineers and to see if the schooner were still in the offing.

They scarcely dared to hope so after the time that had elapsed since their capture by the fetish priests, and in the face of the probability that, if those aboard her had not gone off in alarm, all four had been captured or killed by the savages, "cutting her out" in canoes.

One glance out upon the placid waters of the little cove and the stretch of ocean beyond showed them the schooner was not there.

But there was something else—another craft, nothing more or less than a "lakatoi," or large Papuan sailing canoe, such as is used in the more settled and civilized quarters of the great island continent.

CHAPTER XX

"DEATH TO THE FALSE WHITE QUEEN"

THE lakatoi was moored close inshore to a great high stake, which had been driven into the beach at low tide. The tide was now at its full and the craft was floating the length of its cable a couple of fathoms from the stake.

A very clumsy-looking vessel, a lakatoi is. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently seaworthy to dispense with the almost universal outrigger of these seas, used to prevent capsizing. It is rounded at either end, and its height is increased by light, cane-built cabins, lashed on to the deck. A tree, *got up bodily by the roots*, serves as mast, the roots, spreading horizontally, providing the means of securing it to the deck and ribs. The stays are of cane, and the sails are like a convolvulus leaf, with the broad end cut out so as to leave it crescent-shaped.

There are generally two masts, each with one of these sails, almost the size of the vessel's hull, suspended by its upper edge to the top.

Not a man showed on the deck of the lakatoi, riding there so peacefully at its mooring on the just-turning tide. But, for all the fugitives knew, there might be a dozen natives inside the cane cabins.

The edges of the sails and the stays were decorated with tiny flags and streamers of gaudy colors, just as a gunboat off Spithead would be on the King's birthday.

From the lakatoi the eyes of Señora Balta and the two apprentices traveled to where, just below them, on a sort of natural landing-place, formed by a great flat, tabular rock, the three mutineers were in the act of launching a small canoe capable of holding no more than four persons at most.

Evidently some of the crew of the lakatoi had come ashore in this canoe, and, intending shortly to return aboard, left it upturned and unconcealed upon the rock.

"Quick!" whispered Señora Balta to her boyish companions. "To the canoe as fast as you can, or they will leave us behind, the treacherous cowards."

All three sped swiftly out of the cave and down the rocks. But while yet they were some distance from the water's edge the mutineers succeeded in floating the canoe, and scrambled into it.

Seizing the paddles, the men hastily pushed off, then, dipping their paddles, began to urge the boat quickly in the direction of the lakatoi. Pottle presently ceased paddling, and, looking at the woman and the lads, waved to them as though to go back. Then he pointed at the lakatoi, and made signs ostensibly that the canoe he and his comrades were in was too small to hold any more.

"I think I understand what he is driving at," panted Dick, who, with both his companions, had halted in

bitter chagrin and dismay, believing the mutineers meant leaving them behind to their fate. "The canoe won't hold the six of us, and they mean to try and seize the native ship, and then take us aboard."

"I hope so," said Señora Balta, anxiously, "but I mistrust all three of them. They are more likely to sail off in the lakatoi by themselves if they secure it, I fear, than to trouble about taking us off."

"Three men would find it rather difficult to manage so large and clumsy a vessel. I think they would be glad of even our poor help aboard," answered Dick. "Besides, Pottle swore to stand by me from henceforth, to be my true friend after I saved him from the gorilla in that awful pit; and I think he means to. He'll not hear of us being left behind, or I'm greatly mistaken in him. The Swede, too practically owes his life to Pottle and me, so I think we may safely count on his gratitude also."

"I have learned to trust no man until he has proved himself," returned the woman; and the anxious look upon her face deepened.

She cast a nervous backward glance at the mouth of the cave, then let her gaze travel swiftly along the summit of the cliffs and the stretch of beach.

The mutineers were paddling for all they were worth towards the silent and apparently deserted lakatoi, and the two apprentices eagerly, anxiously watched its deck. Both were fearful of seeing every moment its fierce black crew rush out of one or other of the cabins

and riddle the canoe and its three occupants with a shower of arrows.

Suddenly there was an alarmed cry from Señora Balta, and the lads wheeled round—to behold, to their horror, a dozen Papuan warriors within a few strides of them.

The fellows had stolen on them unawares round a projection in the cliff-wall while their heads were turned toward the canoe.

The instant the boys turned, there was a succession of diabolical yells all about them, and, as if by magic, every rock—every ledge—above and on either side of them, became suddenly alive with savage warriors.

Many of these were members of the Royal body-guard of their late mistress, as Tom could tell by their panoply and appointments.

At the same time out of the cave poured a great mob of priests.

Amid the most terrific uproar, by far the larger number of the savages rushed down with uplifted weapons upon the startled trio at the water's edge. The rest lingered behind to pelt a cloud of arrows at the canoe and its occupants.

But so poor or indifferent was the markmanship that not one of the mutineers was struck, though the deadly shafts fell almost as thick as hail about their ears, and several went through the bottom of the canoe. The water immediately poured in at the holes, but the tiny

craft was close to the lakatoi, and a few more quick strokes of the paddles took it alongside.

On the instant the three men leaped up, grasped the low bulwark and clambered over it on to the deck, leaving their canoe to fill through the arrow-holes and sink, which it did almost immediately.

But the lakatoi was not deserted, as the mutineers had believed. There were no less than four Papuans aboard.

They had been asleep, or else deeply engaged in some game, in the forward cabin, and had not heard the sounds of the paddling. The first intimation they had that there was anything wrong was the shouting ashore.

They rushed out of the cabin only in time to see the three white men pop, like ghosts or visitants from the deep, up over the side and jump aboard.

But perhaps we had better go back and see how our young apprentice heroes and their female companion had fared.

So far as they were concerned, resistance and flight were both out of the question from the first moment of the surprise.

The handful of savages who had crept up under cover of the rocks would have been on them before they could even leap into the sea. And such a move would have meant certain destruction from either a spear-thrust or an arrow or stone through the head before they could swim a stroke.

Moreover, with the true chivalry of American lads, neither youth would have found it in his heart to desert their female companion, after her efforts and sacrifices to save them. And probably she could not swim.

All three, the boys and the woman, therefore stood stock still, and the savages crowded round them with gleeful and vengeful yells.

But none of the wild men ventured to lay hands upon one of them. The band formed a wide ring around the three, so as to preclude the possibility of escape, but seemed hesitant, dubious how to treat their runaway sovereign, the White Queen. For one thing, they still regarded her with superstitious awe and dread on account of the marvelous power of enchantment she possessed over the venomous reptiles she had made her pets, and was even at that moment surrounded by.

The snakes, roused and angered by the hubbub, were now rearing their ugly heads on every side of her and watching the ever-increasing throng around with wickedly sparkling eyes, and growing fear or rage.

Dick and Tom, even in the confusion and alarm of the surprise by the savages, had not forgotten the woman's fearful bodyguard of snakes, and approached her no more closely than had been their wont.

Whether it was out of fear of the reptiles, or the woman's own reputed "black art" and supernatural powers, or whether it was that no man cared to raise his hand against one who had not yet been formally deposed and was still really their supreme queen, any-

how, not a man of those who first surrounded the three, as we have said, ventured to proceed so far as to attempt to secure either of the lads.

But as the rest of the horde—and amongst them the outraged and deeply-insulted fetish priests, headed by the old, ascetic-looking high priest, who had been put to such undignified rout in the treasure cave by the two cobras-di-capello,—surged up and swelled the ring into gigantic proportions, loud and fierce shouts went up. These shouts were not only for vengeance upon the defilers of the shrine of the Golden Fetish—the sacrilegious invaders of the consecrated precincts of the Sacred Labyrinth—but also for the death of the faithless White Queen.

"Down with her! She has allied herself with our hereditary foes and the enemies of the Golden Fetish—with the sacrilegious wretches who would rob the Golden Fetish of its rainbow drops! Death to the false White Queen! Death to the traitress! She has betrayed her people and their confidence in her. After all, for all we know, she may be really one of the same race as these foreign devils. She is their color, she is of the same race and blood in all probability! Down with her! Let us be ruled over in future by one of our own race!"

Such were the fierce and vehement cries that went up. At first they proceeded from only a few in the outer ranks of the great ring surrounding the White Queen and Dick and Tom, but they were speedily taken

up by others in ever-increasing number. Finally, they were tossed about from one savage mouth to another, until at last fully three-fourths of the mighty mob were clamoring for the life of the wonderful woman who had so long ruled them with a rod of iron—who had wielded such despotic sway over them.

Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt now for the first time abandoned all hope and gave themselves up for lost.

They guessed from the behavior and the fierce voices of the crowd, although they understood not a word of what was said, that their female companion's once not-to-be-disputed authority over it was gone. They fully believed that it was only her bodyguard of snakes that kept those nearest them from rushing forward and rending all three of them limb from limb.

It was a situation to daunt the bravest heart; but Señora Balta faced that raging, ravening, blood-famished horde without a symptom of fear.

CHAPTER XXI

A RECAPTURE AND AN ESCAPE

CALMLY, coldly, contemptuously, she stood and threw her eyes over the excited mob, until completely awed by her steadfast and fearless demeanor, even the most ravenous on the outskirts of the crowd hushed their cries and were silent.

It was a sight, indeed, to see that one woman, not by brute force, as a man of herculean strength or indomitable courage might have done, but by sheer, cool, passive courage and a contemptuous manner—that supreme contempt that stings its object so; contempt of them, contempt of death—overawe and hold in check at least five hundred hostile and ferocious savages.

For a full minute she held them thus in perfect control and subjection to her will—a striking instance of the mighty power which a single individual may, by force of character alone, exercise over his or her fellows.

Then—then she spoke in tones of the most scathing, lashing scorn—tones that rang out fearlessly and were audible to every man in that seething mob. Unfortunately, what she said was unintelligible to the two lads, as she spoke in the native tongue.

All the savages round looked rather sheepish at her words, and cast down their eyes, none answering her.

She was continuing, when a loud voice called out something from the back of the crowd. Then there came a slight commotion, and the sub-chief, Likali, who commanded the royal bodyguard, was seen pushing his way boldly to the front.

The White Queen's eyes glittered venomously as she beheld him but she said nothing until he had burst out of the crowd into the ring and confronted her with a fierce and menacing mien. He was a man of giant stature and broad in proportion, and quite dwarfed her. Yet she in no wise appeared daunted.

She positively appeared to grow in height as she scornfully drew herself up and demanded, doubtlessly, by what right he questioned her actions.

Likali broke out into what was clearly a fierce and passionate denunciation, pointing frequently at the apprentices and then waving his hand to seaward in the direction of the lakatoi, aboard and around which was, by the way, transpiring a scene we will presently describe, at length. One thing, however, at a time; we cannot do two things at once.

While Likali was speaking, the aged high priest, whom Señora Balta had so ignominiously put to the right-about in the treasure cave by means of her cobra pets, forced his way through the ring of warriors and fetish priests. He took his stand by the chief's side and joined in the latter's palpable vituperation, with the most vigorous, but probably appropriate, gesticulation.

On that, the woman threw aside her contemptuous

demeanor, and displayed the most ungovernable fury. Her face went almost black, her eyes blazed, and in a voice of thunder she cried out, and took a menacing step towards both her vilifiers.

Likali stood his ground, though with evident perturbation. The high priest, however, with a howl of fear, turned and dashed for refuge amongst the crowd.

It would have been better for the chief had he done the same. The woman uttered her peculiar calls to her venomous pets, and instantly no less than three of the deadliest of the snakes coiled about her waist swung up their heads and darted them swiftly at the face of the hapless chief.

He recoiled with a cry of horror, but too late. The poisoned fangs of one of the creatures were buried in his throat. The other two reptiles bit the arm he instinctively raised to ward off their attack.

With an awful cry he staggered and nearly fell. And, quick as the lightning flash, the White Queen darted at him, snatched the murderous dagger or "beheading knife," made from the leg-bone of a cassowary, that he wore thrust through his girdle, and plunged it almost up to the hilt in his heart.

He fell dead at her feet, with scarcely a groan.

Standing over him with the blood-dripping knife clutched firmly in her right hand, she glared round upon the startled and horrified crowd. Then she uttered a rapid cry, repeating it several times.

On the instant there was great confusion amongst the

savages, a general backward rush, and from various parts of it members of the royal bodyguard began to force their way forward into the ring. But these were only half a dozen, the rest hung back; and, seeing this, the mob seemed to recover from its momentary panic, and once more sullen, angry murmurs rose on all sides.

But the half-dozen loyal guards quickly ranged themselves around their royal mistress and the two boys, presenting their long spears in a perfect, circular *chevaux-de-frise* at the malcontent and rebellious multitude. This gave way in the greatest disorder before the martial array, and in less time than is sufficient to relate it several individuals in the crowd were knocked down and lay sprawling upon the ground.

The handful of loyalists pressed forward, and the mob parted before it, the savages in the way stumbling over and struggling with one another to get out of it. A passage out was thus opened in the throng, and immediately the White Queen and those with her darted at a run through it.

Then the spell she had hitherto cast over the rebellious horde was broken, and a united yell of execration and vengeful fury went up from every throat in it. A forest of clubs, tomahawks, and spears rose into the air, and several javelins and arrows were launched at the little group of faithful guards.

Two of these fell, pierced to the heart, and this partial triumph inspired the mob with true mob-courage. It surged wildly forward, and Dick and Tom, in awful

dismay, realized their few remaining friends must inevitably be overwhelmed.

But both lads as if by mutual accord, with that chivalry they had previously displayed, shouted to Señora Balta to fly—to try and escape to the woods while they did their best to keep the howling crowd in check.

Without replying, she immediately turned and started to run up the rocks towards the cave leading to the Sacred Labyrinth. A few arrows were sent after her, but they all went wide; probably the marksmen did not altogether care to be the instruments of any real injury to her, in their fear of her supposed supernatural powers.

As she flew, she caused most of the snakes clinging about her to wriggle to the ground and interpose between her and her rebellious subjects, as if to cover her retreat.

Dick and Tom, however, were not allowed time to observe her actions, any more than they had been how the mutineers had fared aboard the *lakatoi*, for with a rush the raging horde was around them.

The three or four loyal guards fell almost immediately, thrust through and through by their swarming assailants' spears, or hacked to pieces by the showering stone axes and clubs.

Dick was caught by a "man-catcher" in the hands of a Papuan brave. This is a light, long-handled cane loop, which is passed over the head of the fugitive much

as a lasso is. Sometimes a spike is fixed just where the ends of the loop fit into the handle. When the Papuan head-hunter throws his "man-catcher" over his victim, he gives it a violent jerk, so that the nape of the captive's neck is impaled upon this spike.

Fortunately, in the case of our apprentice hero, this dreadful spike was missing. Nevertheless, he suffered severe injury from the cruel jerk of the loop round his neck. His throat was cut and bruised, and he was flung upon the back of his head, half-strangled and choked.

It was a wonder, too, that he did not fracture his skull upon the hard rock, such was the force with which he went down.

Tom Merritt got off but little better than his chum. In his case three of the fetish priests leaped upon him, and beat him to the ground with frenzied blows of their naked fists and ferocious kicks, screeching the while more like wild cats than human beings. Then they knelt upon him, and forced his face against the rock, while they bound his hands behind him.

The loyal guards destroyed, and the white boys secured, some of the savages, headed by the doubly-insulted high priest, rushed off inside the cave in pursuit of their runaway queen. But, well acquainted, as she was, with all the intricacies and outlets of the labyrinth—as well acquainted, indeed, as the high priest himself—it was more likely than not she would succeed in baffling them within it, and effecting her escape thence into the forests.

After his captors had bound Tom, some of them discovered his pockets to be full of the precious stones looted from the treasure chamber. Thereupon the frenzy of the superstitious savages was wrought to a frightful pitch; and it would have gone hard indeed with both lads—they would probably have been torn in pieces there and then, had not the priests declared they must be sacrificed to the Golden Fetish in reparation for the unheard of sacrilege.

At it was, both lads were subjected to the most brutal treatment. They were kicked and beaten with fists and the butts of the savages' spears most unmercifully, until sensibility deserted them, and they lay, side by side, bereft of all further feeling, in the midst of their cruel foes.

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We will return to Carker and the other two mutineers, and explain what happened to them.

As we have said, the four natives on board the *lakatoi* or Papuan ship, only came rushing out of the deck-cabins in time to see the three scramble aboard.

The former were, therefore, too startled and surprised to offer any great resistance, whereas the latter had expected opposition, and were ready to meet it.

With up-raised axes and roaring like bulls, the mutineers dashed at the startled Papuan sailors, two of whom were cut down instantly. The other two fled for their lives along the deck, aft, madly pursued by Carker and Pottle. Slisberg, at the ex-mate's direction, ran

forward and severed with a slash of his ax the rope mooring the craft to the stake.

Immediately the vessel began to drift out on the fast flowing ebb-tide.

One of the natives, fleeing from Carker and Pottle, jumped over the vessel's side and struck out for the shore. The other took refuge inside the aft cabin, the door of which was immediately fastened upon him.

The mutineers were now masters of the lakatoi; but a great party of the savages ashore—those who had not surrounded the White Queen and Dick and Tom began to pelt arrows and throwing-spears at them, and some twenty or thirty warriors, rushing down to the water's edge, plunged in and swam out toward them.

Carker and his companions hastily took shelter behind the fore cabin, and so, though javelins, arrows, and stones fell thickly aboard, they escaped injury.

The heavy war-arrow used by these people, as we may have likewise elsewhere stated, is sometimes more than six feet in length. The natives can shoot it with accuracy from one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards.

It is not feathered, and is about half an inch thick. The head or point is detachable and made of bone or the claw of a crab, and carefully poisoned. One scratch of it is enough to cause death or awful torture, ending in raving madness.

Under the lee of the cabin, the mutineers hauled on the ropes and hoisted the foresail. Then Carker,

at the imminent risk of being struck down by the missiles hurtling aboard, rushed aft and jammed over the tiller. This brought the clumsy craft round and away she stood for the open sea.

Not a moment too soon, for the savages in the water were almost upon her, coming on with swift and telling strokes, carrying their spears or knives between their teeth.

For fear of hitting some of their swimming friends, the savages ashore had ceased launching their missiles at the lakatoi, so that Carker was able to steer without further risk, and Pottle and Slisberg to hoist the other sail.

Gathering speed with every second, the vessel was soon bounding swiftly away before the breeze, and the natives swimming after her were obliged to abandon their futile efforts to overtake her, and turn back.

The Papuans had *prahus* (or proas) and canoes further along the beach, but it would have been vain to give chase to the lakatoi in them, and so she was let go without further attempt at recapture.

Without a doubt, she had been the prize of some piratical and head-hunting expedition among the neighboring islands or along the New Guinea coast.

CHAPTER XXII

THE INTERRUPTED SACRIFICE

WHEN Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt reopened their eyes, it was to find themselves bound hand and foot with grass ropes, and the sole inmates of a small rock chamber, dimly lighted.

The walls of their prison were hung with the skins of wild beasts and gaudy feather-work, and here and there were grotesque and hideous idols, or fetishes, carved in wood or stone.

A lamp, made of sea-shells, and hanging from the center of the vaulted roof, flickered with a feeble glare, and filled the place with a somnolent aroma. On a sort of brazier in the middle of the cave, burned a small bluish flame. It was the "sacred fire," never suffered to go out, but watched over most carefully by the native priests.

Dick was the first to recover consciousness, but it was long after Tom had likewise done so before either could do more than groan with the pain he was suffering. They had both been most roughly handled by their savage captors, and were covered with congealed blood and dirt.

Their more serious hurts had, however, been dressed by the priests, to their exceeding astonishment.

Gloomily and despondently, the boys at length between their groans of pain began to speculate upon the manner of doom they were being reserved for.

"Reckon now the restraining influence of the White Queen is gone, our captors will be for roasting and eating us," moaned Tom.

But Dick rightly concluded, from the fact that they were evidently confined somewhere either in the Sacred Labyrinth or the temple buildings, that they would be sacrificed to the outraged Golden Fetish.

They wondered how the mutineers had fared—whether these had got away safely after all in the lakatoi, or been caught and slain, and whether Señora Balta had escaped or not.

Firmly did Dick believe that she at least, if she were still alive and at liberty, would make an effort to rescue them, and this in spite of her late truly diabolical conduct.

"But the chances sure are she either will not be given the opportunity to do so, or that she will only fruitlessly sacrifice her own life as well," rejoined Merritt.

After some hours had elapsed, the patter of naked feet was heard approaching their prison. Then the curtain of skins covering the entrance to the cave was thrust aside, and six of the assistant priests entered, bearing food and drink.

The boys' hands were unbound, but their ankles were left lashed together, so that they could not rise

to more than a sitting posture. Mightily glad were they both of the food, for they were positively famished. It consisted of cold roast pork, native bread, and fruit.

Two kinds of drink were offered them in calabash cups—water, and a spirituous liquor, the fermented juice of a narcotic plant, that had a most vile taste, and of which they promptly spat out the very first mouthful with wry faces and ejaculations of disgust. Of the water, however, they drank copiously, and it seemed to put new life into them.

After they had satisfied their hunger and thirst, their hands were once more bound behind them, though not so tightly as to hurt them, and they were left alone again for some five or six hours. At the end of that time their priestly gaolers again entered with food and drink. Then they were left undisturbed for the night.

Of course, they had no means of knowing that it was night again beyond the lapse of time.

Despite the terrible predicament they were in, they both dropped off quickly into a sound sleep, and did not wake until the entrance of their gaolers next morning with their breakfast.

They expected to be led out surely now at any rate, to immediate torture or death. But, greatly to their surprise and, needless to add, their unbounded relief, they were once more left to themselves.

All that day, too, as well as the next, they remained inmates of that rock-cell, the priests, who, they soon discovered, closely guarded it so as to preclude any

possibility of their rescue or escape, bringing them food and drink at regular intervals.

The lads were greatly puzzled over this delay in bringing them to the doom they were being reserved for; but they concluded some festival or other was near at hand, for which the priests were saving them. In the circumstances, neither could entertain any hope that their lives were to be spared.

It was about noon on the fourth day since their recapture, when they heard a great hubbub, at first deadened by distance, but gradually growing louder and louder. Soon they were able to distinguish the beating of tom-toms and the blowing of conches, or horns.

Their brave hearts almost stood still with sickening apprehension. Their hour of doom had come, they needed no telling!

That their fears were well founded was proved presently, when the skins covering the entrance to the cave were flung aside, and the hideous old high-priest, with several subordinates, entered, attended by a strong guard of warriors, conspicuous amongst whom were several of the White Queen's mutinous bodyguard.

The high-priest gave an order, and two of the warriors severed the grass ropes which bound the feet and hands of the horror-stricken youths, and helped them to rise. Then the priests struck up a weird, monotonous chant, and led the way from the cave,

the warriors bringing up the rear around the pale and trembling captives.

"Courage, old man!" whispered Dick, though in accents that sounded rather tremulous. "Keep your heart up! Never say die! Let us face what lies before us as bravely as we can. Commend your soul to God, Tom. He will give us courage to meet our ends."

Tom did not answer. He felt that to have done so would mean breaking down, and *that* he did not want. It would be showing the white feather, and he was determined to face his doom as gamely every whit as his chum.

Both lads prayed—prayed, ah, how fervently, hopefully, only their God and themselves knew!—as they suffered themselves to be conducted along gallery after gallery of that strange and wonderful labyrinth by their savage guards.

Presently they came to the end of the tunnel, and found themselves led inside the subterranean temple of the Golden Fetish.

The place was full to suffocation with Papuan men, women, and children. A very narrow passage alone was kept by some of the insurgent royal guard from the entrance right up to the gorgeous statue. Along this passage the priests conducted the two shrinking, despairing lads.

Dick Selwyn cast an anxious eye around on the assembled multitude, and his brave heart sank within

him as he realized how vain any attempt at escape now would be.

Amid a death-like stillness, the boys were led up to the treacherous steps of the fetish. Now they comprehended, with a thrill of unspeakable, limb and brain-paralyzing horror, the death that was meant for them.

They were to be forced to mount the steps of the pedestal, and thus set the hidden machinery in motion by their weight upon these, when the Golden Fetish, pedestal, steps, and all, would revolve quickly under their feet, throwing them off their balance, and precipitating them headlong down the frightful gulf that would be unmasked.

They would have no chance of catching hold of the ladder of staples, and escaping down this to the treasure cave below.

The priests commenced a new and somewhat more musical chant; the whole multitude joined in with more or less harmony; and terrific drum-beating and horn-blowing added to the deafening din, which was enough to have split the rocky roof in twain.

Dick and Tom, casting anxious glances over their shoulders, were agonized with horror to see a score or more of the warriors advancing in a half-moon upon them with leveled spears to urge them on to the fatal, treacherous steps of the pedestal.

The next minute they could not believe their eyes. The Golden Fetish, the pedestal and steps revolved before them, and up, out of the yawning aperture thus

uncovered, popped the head and shoulders of—what?

Surely nothing human! It had the appearance of a monstrous orang-outang.

It was one, without a doubt, Dick and Tom thought on the instant.

Both lads leaped back involuntarily with horrified cries, that were however drowned by the deafening clamor going on. But the next moment the spearmen beheld the startling apparition, which was climbing out of the abyss with anything but the agility of the fearsome creature it looked like.

They all halted as if petrified. Then, with shrieks of terror that rose loud even above the din, flung down their arms, and wheeling round, stamped madly for the door of the temple.

All was instantly confusion and excitement. Those in the front ranks of the crowd caught sight of the awful apparition; the drum-beating and horn-blowing ceased as if by magic, and the chanting was changed into the most terror-stricken howls and shrieks.

A panic seized upon all, and terrible was the general stampede that ensued. The strong knocked down and tampled upon the weak; women and children were trodden into shapeless masses. Many of the warriors, in their insensate terror and the utter brutal selfishness born thereof, clubbed, tomahawked, and speared all who were in their way, to clear a passage for themselves.

Scores must have lost their lives, or been mortally injured in one way or another, in that fearful panic.



"SO HERE GOES!" CRIED TOM DESPERATELY.

"Secret of the Golden Idol."

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The two prisoners—the intended victims of the fetish—were forgotten in the terror and confusion of the moment.

Both were almost as much startled and horrified, at the outset, at the horrible apparition as the savages. Naturally they supposed for the minute it was a real gorilla let loose purposely upon them.

But what was their amazement and ineffable relief to hear it address them in broken English and the well-known voice of Señora Balta, the White Queen.

“Quick! quick! Down de ladda weeth you; I weel folla ver’ soon.”

Then the boys could hardly have restrained their laughter at the trick the woman had played upon the savages, had it not been quite so serious a matter for themselves—had not every moment been so very precious.

She had wrapped herself in the orang-outang’s skin so completely, and her hands and feet were so neatly hidden that from in front it would have been impossible, at any rate at the first glance, to detect the cheat.

Quick to recover from their joyful surprise, the boys, one after the other, dropped upon all fours, and, swinging themselves over the edge of the gulf, seized the topmost staples and hurriedly began the descent.

The awful uproar above—the screeching, howling, and trampling—lasted until they were both more than half-way down, when it was deadened by the reclosing of the gulf. Señora Balta was also descending the lad-

der, and had pressed the spring that worked the machinery of the statue.

Tom Merritt, who was first, felt beneath him at length the ledge in front of the exit from the chasm, and stepping on to it, groped for the cave-mouth.

His hands came in contact with a wooden door. He pushed upon it, but it refused to yield, so he passed his hands up and down it and felt a latch. This he promptly lifted, the door swung open, and he saw before him the treasure cave, ablaze as before with its rare contents in the lamplight.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SECURE HIDING-PLACE

BUT the lavish wealth before him had no attractions for Tom Merritt at that moment, any more than it had for Dick Selwyn, who speedily dropped down beside him. They entered the treasure-chamber, then turned anxiously and waited until their deliveress joined them.

She had doffed the ape's skin so as to have the freer use of her limbs, and carried it slung around her shoulders. She had not thrown it into the waterfall, thinking it might prove serviceable again if they were pursued or intercepted by the savages.

None of her extraordinary pets, her terrible snake guards, were twined about her this time. But she had stuck in her belt no less than four six-chambered revolvers—some of those taken by the Fetish priests from the persons of Carker and his fellow mutineers.

Immediately on rejoining the apprentices in the treasure-cave, she handed one of these precious little weapons to each, with the remark that he would find it loaded in every chamber.

"Now," she said, "we must get away into the forest as quickly as we can. The Papuans will doubtless soon recover from the scare I have given them, and range

through the labyrinth in search of us. Mutchi Ki, the high priest, may guess the ruse I played upon him, and we must not afford him time to post guards at the different exits."

She led the boys to one of the recesses of the cavern; and there, to their great surprise and delight, they saw all the weapons captured by the Fetish priests from the mutineers thrown together in a heap. In their superstition, and ignorance of the use of the fire-arms, the savages had stored them here as a further offering to their offended deity.

Dick and Tom needed not the White Queen's advice each to strap a rifle and bandolier across his back, and slip two more revolvers apiece in their pockets.

When they were thus armed, their hearts lightened considerably. They felt they could now render a good account of themselves if again molested by their fierce foes.

Señora Balta also slung a magazine rifle over her shoulder, observing as she did so, with a smile:

"I have lost all my snake guards, but I think these arms will more than make amends."

Without further loss of time then, she crossed the treasure-chamber to the bas-relief carving of the hideous fetish's head masking the secret gallery, and pressed the hidden spring. Next, taking down one of the lamps that lit the treasure-cave, she and the boys entered the passage, and, reclosing the entrance behind them, hurried along it as fast as they could.

Without misadventure, or hearing or seeing anything of the savages, they gained the cave opening on the sea-shore. After a careful reconnaissance, to prevent their walking into a possible ambush set for them by the wily high priest, they stole forth, and climbed up the steep and broken path that led to the cliff-top.

Señora Balta then took the lead again. She had already informed the lads she had discovered a secure hiding-place, where they might remain concealed from discovery by the savages—for months, she thought.

Plunging into the forest, careless, in their dread of pursuit and recapture by their human foes, of any change encountered with the wild beasts or venomous reptiles infesting it, they pushed on as quickly as the difficult nature of the ground, the tangled tropical vegetation, would permit.

When they had penetrated some distance, they took what precautions they could very well against leaving any clue to a possible pursuer as to the way they had taken. They avoided all damp or miry places where their feet would have left prints, and, where they trod down the long grass, Tom and Dick carefully rearranged this.

They were particularly careful not to leave any scraps of their clothing behind adhering to the thorny scrub, as well as not to break any twigs or brambles.

In places where it was impossible to pass without leaving footprints, on account of the marshy soil, Dick, who brought up the rear, painstakingly effaced all

traces of their passage, sometimes even leaving imprints of his own feet pointing either at right angles, or in the exactly opposite direction to the route they were following, so as to misguide any trackers.

Every step of the way they were ascending, and soon they were traversing rugged, stony defiles high up the mountain ridge. With their legs nearly dropping off them with fatigue, they at last halted on the brink of a mighty chasm, or rent, in the mountain chain.

The rock fell away at their feet in a sheer precipice to a fathomless depth, and the opposite side of the awful gulf was over a hundred yards distant at least.

The lads looked at the woman in bewilderment. How were they to cross here? Why had she brought them this way?

The chasm zigzagged away on either hand as far as their eyes could reach, and in no place did its width appear to be bridged over in any way.

The secure hiding-place Señora Balta had said she would take them to must be somewhere hereabouts, both lads at once concluded. But where could it be? All around them was a level tableland, with only a few stunted trees dotted over its surface.

They were standing beside one of these trees, a small, but stout-looking one, growing near the very verge of the precipice, and partly overhanging this. But that stunted tree could afford them no concealment

Señora Balta saw their puzzled looks, read the unspoken question in their faces, and said, with a light smile:

"Ye would never guess the location of my hiding-place. I discovered it myself accidentally by approaching the spot on the opposite side of the chasm. It a cave about twenty feet below in the face of the precipice. We will descend to it by means of a rope I haf contrived and hidden here."

And so saying she advanced to the stunted tree already referred to as overhanging the brink, and, stooping down, pulled up a few loose sods of grass at its roots. She revealed a small hole in the ground, from which she drew a coil of "sipos," or ropelike vines, plaited and twisted together.

The apprentices naturally felt some trepidation when they learned they would have to swing over that fearful abyss by such a rope. But neither liked to seem to show the white feather before the other, and in the face of the fact that the woman herself had achieved the feat and thought nothing apparently of it.

"I will go first," Señora Balta said, "and show you what to do."

She threw the rope over the projecting branch of the tree, and, drawing the two ends together, tossed them over the precipice. Then, seizing the doubled rope between her hands, she fearlessly launched herself into the gulf—lowered herself slowly hand under hand.

Throwing themselves down on the edge of the preci-

pice, the boys peered over and saw her descend to a dark fissure in the rock about twenty or thirty feet below them, and swing herself cleverly into it.

The two ends of the rope dangled free the next instant as she released them, and then the lads saw her arm protrude from the cave-mouth and sign to one of them to descend.

Tom hesitated; so Dick said:

"I'll go first, if you like, old chap."

Merritt colored up a little.

"Oh, it isn't exactly that I'm frightened to attempt the descent," he hastened to assure his chum. "But say, Dick, how are we going to get up again if Señora Balta pulls the rope down after us, as I think she means to do?"

"Humph! I never thought of that. Oh, but remember, she has already once made use of the cave, and so must know how to get up or out when she wants to. Of course, it's simple enough! She ties a weight of some kind to one end of the rope and then flings it over this branch again."

"Ah—er, yes, of course. That's the way she must manage. Well, I suppose this descent has to be made, so here goes!" cried Tom, desperately.

With too evident reluctance, he grasped the rope and swung himself over the cliff.

The first thrill of horror at finding himself suspended by that frail hold over such a fearful drop was for the minute almost sufficient to unnerve him, to make his

senses reel, and cause him to let go the rope. But, fortunately, this awful sensation quickly passed off, and then, feeling almost as much at home hanging there by his hands 'twixt heaven and earth, as he would have done among the spars and rigging of the old *Albatross*, to his own great astonishment and relief, Tom dropped rapidly down the rope.

In another minute he felt Señora Balta clasp his ankles and pull him inside the cave, when he slid safely to the rock-floor in front of her.

Dick Selwyn was soon standing beside them inside the cave, which, though narrow and rather low-roofed, ran a good way back into the heart of the cliff, as the boys afterwards learned. Señora Balta immediately took hold of one length of the rope, and pulled it off the tree overhead and inside the cave, coiling it round her elbow.

The boys expressed themselves delighted with their retreat, and the woman explained she had lived there the best part of their captivity, until finding the Papuan priests made no attempt to capture her, she had determined to reënter the labyrinth and try and learn what had become of them.

In one of the caves she had found the skins of the slain orang-outangs, and, discovering, from a conversation between two of the priests she chanced to overhear, that the lads were to be sacrificed to the Golden Fetish, had conceived the bold design of dressing herself up in one of the skins and frightening the savages by making

her appearance from the pit beneath the fetish at the very moment of the contemplated sacrifice.

Both Dick and Tom were loud now in the expression of their admiration of her magnificent daring and resource, and in their asservations of heartfelt gratitude for their rescue. They poured out their thanks to her vehemently, brokenly, and said they could not thank her sufficiently for what she had done for them—that they would never forget her service, or be able to repay her.

In the face of all she had so unselfishly dared and done to save them, neither could any longer view her with the abhorrence and detestation they had but so lately done, on account of her dreadful treatment of the mutineers.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE

SENORA BALTA had stocked the cave well with food and water during her occupation of it, and the three now sat down to a most satisfying repast.

While they ate and drank, they discussed their plans for the future, and decided to keep within the cave during the next few days, and only venture forth at night to replenish their provisions, lest the savages should discover them, and, giving chase, light upon their retreat.

The woman showed the boys how to leave their cliff-home by running a noose on the rope and casting it upwards until it settled upon the tree overhanging the cliff-top. She proved herself a truth South American by her expertness in this way, hardly ever failing to lasso the tree at the very first cast.

When night came, the lads lay down on litters of grass and leaves close to the cave-mouth, and Señora Balta withdrew to the inner cavern.

All the next day they remained close within their retreat, as they had decided on doing, passing the time anyhow—talking, eating, and dozing. This enforced rest was of the greatest benefit to both lads, and enabled

them to recruit their health and strength after their late privations and exertions.

When they believed the Papuans had abandoned the search for them, and gone back to the village on the other side of the island, they meant to rig up a flag of distress of some kind on the highest cliff, so as to attract the attention of any passing ship, and keep a big fire going at night, with the same view. But to have attempted either means of signaling at present while the savages were about, would have been worse than madness.

It was the fourth night of their occupation of the cliff-cave. The night before, and the night before that as well, they had stolen forth from their hiding-place, and collected food and water. The water they collected in bags which they had made out of the skin of a wild pig, which Dick the first night surprised asleep and knocked over with his rifle-butt before it could get away. They had seen and heard nothing of the savages on these two foraging expeditions. So on this, the fourth night, they were bent upon making a reconnaissance, and learning whether or not the savages were still in the vicinity.

The trio were, of course, not so very far from the temple or Tambu-house, on the mountain-top, where the priests of the Fetish had their headquarters, and year in, year out, had kept guard over the Sacred Labyrinth long before the discovery of the pirates'

treasure and the supersedure of the gods of their forefathers for the gorgeous Peruvian image.

By creeping close up to this building, our three friends hoped to learn whether the Papuan army was still encamped near. If it were not, then they might safely rely the savages had abandoned the search for them and returned home across the island, leaving the fetish priests, as before, in sole occupation of that side.

Señora Balta knew that if the savage warriors had taken their departure, she and her companions would be tolerably safe from further pursuit or molestation, as the priests of the fetish but seldom went beyond the precincts of the Tambu-house.

"They live the best part of their lives underground in the mazy galleries, halls, and little chapels of the labyrinth they guard so religiously," she said.

This labyrinth, she also explained to her boyish companions, was a wonder of Nature's own making. It must have been formed by some tremendous upheaval or convulsion of the earth's surface, due to volcanic agency doubtless, at a remote period of the world's history. The springs that flowed then, and composed the subterranean flood from which Dick had such a narrow escape, must have further hollowed out and connected the various cavities in the course of time.

Many such labyrinths of subterranean grottoes exist in Germany, and there are some in England, the best known being the caves near Torquay; the Peak, in

Derbyshire; and Poole's cave near Buxton; while who has not heard of the famous Mammoth Cave in our own Kentucky?

In the dead of the night, accordingly, one after the other, the two apprentices and the woman climbed to the cliff top, having lassoed the tree above at sundown, for fear of their not being able to distinguish it later in the dark, and started in the direction of the Tambu-house.

Each was armed with a rifle and a brace of revolvers.

Señora Balta appeared to have little difficulty in finding her way, despite the inky blackness of the night. But they picked their steps gingerly through the boulder-strewn defiles, as well as the clumps of timber, lest they should meet with any unlooked-for mischance.

At length the summit of the tableland, upon which the Tambu-house stood, appeared ahead—a darker mass against the dark sky.

Climbing to the top of a little eminence that commanded a full view of the plateau, their satisfaction knew no bounds at seeing not a single campfire upon it.

There was not a light to be seen, except a fitful flicker shining through some aperture or chink in the wall of either the Tambu-house itself, or one of the contiguous buildings. The Papuan army was certainly no longer encamped around the temple.

Without a doubt the savage warriors had all returned to their homes on the other side of the island, supposing their intended sacrificial victims had been

devoured by the awful monster that had issued from the pit in the subterranean temple, and which, probably, they looked upon as the Golden Fetish itself incarnate.

All three of our friends were not merely immensely relieved—they were overjoyed.

“We can start our beacon-fires this very night, señora,” cried Tom, gleefully, and cutting an extravagant caper in the exuberance of his delight.

“Not to-night. I have something better to suggest we do to-night,” replied the woman quickly. “Boys, it would be the height of folly on our part to leave all the wealth that treasure-cave in the labyrinth contains. If ever we succeed in getting back to civilization, a portion of it would be very desirable, and we have as much right to it as any one. The exit from the labyrinth, by which I escaped, lies close by here. We can easily get in by it, and we are not likely to be molested by the guardian priests at this hour.”

The boys hesitated. It seemed like putting their heads into the lion’s mouth.

Moreover, Dick was asking himself would they not be bound, if they did succeed in securing any of the treasure and taking it back with them to civilization, to restore it to its rightful owners in Peru—the party of Lima residents who had chartered the brig cut out and plundered by Pedro Balta and his pirate crew?

The woman took their hesitancy solely for fear, and with a slight sneer continued:

“I will go alone, then, if you are afraid to accom-

pany me. I, at any rate, am not content to go back to civilization a pauper, and haf to beg my bread, perhaps, when all dis ownerless wealth—perfect treasure-trove—lies within my grasp. I shall go back to civilization a rich voman, or not at all.”

“No, no, señora,” implored Tom Merritt, who really, small blame to him, *did* shrink from another exploration of those awful underground passages and the chance of recapture by the bloodthirsty fetish priests; “do nothing so rash. You will only go to your death.”

“You certainly must not go alone,” said Dick. “The safety of us all is concerned in this; and if you go we accompany you. Eh, Tom? You risked your life, señora, to save us. We shall not let you face the danger alone now, I have my doubts about our being justified in appropriating any of this treasure we may obtain possession of, for the rightful owners are all probably still living in Peru; but still we could make restitution and claim salvage.”

“*Si, si!* [Yes, yes]” agreed Señora Balta, somewhat impatiently, and with feverish eagerness evidently to be about the looting of the treasure chamber.

Dick’s suggestion set at rest the vague qualms of conscience that had arisen in both lad’s breasts, and whereas before they had been rather averse to the woman’s proposal, they were now almost as eager as she was to start on the enterprise.

Perhaps, however, we had better make an exception in the case of Tom Merritt, who went in deadly fear

of the merciless fetish priests, and only consented to join in the project rather than appear to be cowardly, or be left behind.

Once more, therefore, Señora Balta led the way forward, presently turning off at a right angle to their former course down a very narrow, broken, and steeply-descending defile.

The lads followed her with their hearts very near their mouths, it must be admitted, and peering right and left anxiously into the darkness at every step for fear of an ambushade.

More than once Tom Merritt started back in affright, and almost let fly a shot from his revolver at some bush or rocky boulder, mistaking it in the deep gloom of the ghostly place for a savage about to spring upon them.

Lower and lower they descended, deeper and deeper into the stony gully, until the rocky walls shutting them in on either hand towered fifty or sixty feet above their heads, and the darkness rose up before them like an impenetrable inky barrier.

Presently the cliffs overhead met, and they were within a natural tunnel or grotto. Now, to the lads' surprise, Señora Balta struck a match, and lit a horn-shaped lamp she had brought from the treasure-cave on the occasion of their former flight.

"You vonder where I got de matches, eh?" she asked, smiling. "Mutchi, the high priest, found a box on de mutineer Carker, and I appropriated dem."

The gallery they were in did not pass under the Tambu-house, but ran round the labyrinth and formed a junction with the main passage leading from the subterranean temple—the one containing the Golden Fetish—to the cave on the seashore where the treasure had originally been concealed by Pedro Balta and his pirate crew.

This junction of the two passages was closer to the shore than the temple—indeed, it was almost opposite the entrance to the secret gallery masked in the treasure-chamber by the bas-relief fetish's head.

As the three approached the cross-passage, they were startled by hearing the murmur of voices!

They halted in alarm and grasped their weapons.

Another moment and they saw a disc of bright light dancing on the rocky roof of the main gallery just ahead of them. Only for a few seconds did the gleam of light remain thus; then it darted swiftly along the wall and settled upon one of the stalactitic pillars. A man's head and shoulders came within the circle of light, and all three anxious watchers uttered simultaneous but subdued exclamations of surprise and recognition.

It was Manuel Diaz, the mulatto, who had been left by Carker in charge of the *Albatross*, with three companions.

Señora Balta drew in her breath slowly and hissingly at sight of the man against whom she cherished such deadly hatred and vengeful malignity—the sole sur-

vivor now of that blood-stained and piratical band that had murdered her husband and mercilessly marooned her on a barren rock.

While the three still watched, to their utter amaze none other than James Carker himself stepped forward into the light, which evidently proceeded from a lantern set on a boulder.

The mutineer chief had a revolver in one hand. With the other he was dragging along a terrified-looking shivering Papuan, whose mouth was gagged by a cloth tied over it.

This captive wretch was the native seaman the ex-mate, Pottle, and Slisberg had carried off aboard the *lakatoi*.

Dick and his companions, too amazed, as well as doubtful what sort of a reception would be theirs, to do more than remain silent spectators of the scene before them, now heard Carker issue a low command, and saw others of the mutineers come forward. One of the party took up the lantern, and they all turned and disappeared into the secret gallery behind the stalactites—the most direct way to the treasure-cave.

CHAPTER XXV

A BOLD PROJECT

"THE schooner is outside in the cove, without the shadow of a doubt," whispered Dick Selwyn, to his companions, as the footsteps of the band died away.

"And they are bent on the same errand as ourselves," added Señora Balta, breathlessly; "the looting of the treasure-chamber."

"What had we best do?" anxiously inquired Tom.

"What do *you* suggest, señora?" and Dick turned to the woman, whose subtle brain seemed never at a loss for a shrewd way out of any difficulty. "Do you think we can trust Carker and the other mutineers—that it would be wise for us to show ourselves to them? I don't, especially now they've met Diaz and the other three. They'll never let us accompany them back to civilization, knowing a word from us would send them all to the gallows. Besides, I have no wish to associate with such cutthroats as they are."

"No, we cannot trust them," answered the woman. "And I—I will haf the heart's blood of that scoundrelly mulatto, Diaz, if I haf to pay de penalty with my own life immediately after," she grated through her set teeth.

"No," she went on, after a momentary cogitation,

"I haf something better to suggest. Let us seize their boat. They cannot haf left more than one man in it; more likely they haf simply drawn it up on to the shore. We will seize the boat and row out to the schooner, surprise and overpower the one or two men left aboard her and take possession. Dat done, ve dictate our own terms to Señor Carker and his companions ashore—leaf them behind to the mercy of the savages, if they von't be reasonable, and sail off."

The very boldness of such a feat appealed strongly to the boys. Both were all eagerness at once to attempt it, counting not the chances against its success, never waiting to think that failure would place them in a far worse plight than they had been in. Yet, after all, it was clearly their best move.

They had blown out their lamp at the first alarm. Señora Balta now softly struck another match and relighted it again.

While she and Tom, then, lingered behind to prevent any one on the shore outside seeing the light, Dick, revolver in hand, crept stealthily forward to the cross-cave to reconnoiter.

They saw him peep cautiously round the rocky bend; then he stepped out boldly and vanished round it.

After what seemed hours in their keen anxiety and suspense, Señora Balta and Tom saw him reappear at the cross-passage and beckon them forward.

When they rejoined him, he whispered:

"Pottle, the Englishman, is the only man on guard

outside the cave-mouth. He has his back turned, watching the approach to the beach. Whether the schooner is in the bay or not, I can't see. Guess she must be though, and is not showing any lights for fear they may be seen by the savages."

"Reckon if we proceed with caution, we should be able to hold Pottle up," said Tom. "He's not the one to show fight if he finds himself in a close corner. And, besides, I think he's rather friendly inclined towards us—that he'd help us if he could."

"Yes," agreed Dick. "He swore he'd be my true friend, if ever I needed him, for aiding him to kill the orang-outang."

"For saving his life, you mean, old chum," corrected Merritt.

"Come on, then, we will interview him," said Señora Balta. "We must lose no time. Carker and the others may get a scare and return suddenly. Walk soft—make no more noise than you can help. It will be better to catch your English friend napping, if we can. We may rely more on his kindly intentions den."

With this, she blew out the lamp again, and the three stole softly and cautiously towards the mouth of the cavern.

Gaining it, they paused for a minute and looked forth in search of Pottle.

But the night was so dark after the light of the lamp that it was a minute or two before Tom and the

woman descried his huge, ungainly figure against the inky sky, even when Dick pointed it out to them.

The Englishman was standing leaning against a fallen rock, with his rifle in the crook of his arm, alternately glancing to right and left of him, in search of any foes approaching round the cliffs.

The boat lay close by upon a shelving strip of pebbly beach left uncovered by the tide.

Like hunters stalking game, the boys and their female companion stole up behind the unsuspecting man, whose first intimation of their presence was the low but resolute command in Dick's voice:

"Don't move, or utter a cry, Pottle! We have you covered by three revolvers, and if you attempt resistance or call out, I swear we will not hesitate to shoot you."

The mutineer gave a convulsive start and a half gasp of horrified surprise. Then he asked, in a cautious, frightened whisper, without venturing to turn his head:

"Is that you, Master Selwyn? Heavens be thanked! Say, you nigh on made me jump out of my skin with fright. I thought it wor one of them hateful niggers about to stick his spear through me."

Señora Balta stepped up and snatched his rifle out of his hands.

"Oh, Master Selwyn," gasped the man, "I promised to be your friend. You're not going to bind me, are you?"

"No, not unless you put us to the necessity of so doing."

"I'll do whatever you want me to do, Master Selwyn. Ain't I under a debt of gratitude to you, sir, what I guess, I can never hope to repay. Didn't you save my life? I am your friend, Master Selwyn. I swear to you I'll help you in any way I can. What do you want me to do?"

"Just to help us in every way you can, as you say you are willing to. We will trust you, Pottle; but, mark me, if you do attempt any treachery, I will shoot you if I can without the slightest compunction. We are going to trust you, but we know we cannot trust your fellow-mutineers; and we mean to seize the schooner and then dictate our own terms to them."

"I am with you, Master Selwyn," cried the man, promptly. "I will join you if you'll promise not to give me away, if we get back home, for the hand I took in the mutiny."

"We can make no promises at this stage. But do you stand by us and help us all you can, and you'll have no cause to regret it."

The words were hardly out of Dick's mouth when there came a warning cry from Señora Balta, and a spear whizzed right between him and Pottle and splintered itself upon a rocky boulder near.

Instantly all four faced about—to see a number of black forms racing over the beach towards them.

Quick as thought Señora Balta raised the rifle she

had snatched from Pottle to her shoulder, and fired two shots in rapid succession at the oncoming mob.

The two leading figures stumbled blindly forward and fell writhing and shrieking upon their faces, whereupon the others, with howls of fear and baffled rage, turned and scampered madly back for the shelter of the rocks.

"Señor Selwyn—Señor Merritt, quick, do you launch the boat! I can keep these few foes back alone, or with your aid, my friend," coolly handing back his rifle to Pottle, and proceeding to unsling her own.

A few badly-aimed spears fell around the little group, but the British sailor immediately replied with two or three hasty shots at random from his recovered piece, causing all the blacks to dodge out of sight again like so many Jacks-in-boxes.

Then he and their late White Queen took cover behind a couple of the bowlders near and blazed away wildly in the darkness. The pair fired as fast as they could work the bolts and pull the triggers in the hope of scaring off the assailants or keeping these crouching too closely in shelter to fling spears or shoot arrows with any accuracy.

Dick and Tom rushed to the boat, and proceeded to try and get it down to the water's edge.

But it was the schooner's long-boat, and they found it beyond their strength to move it. It was laden, too, they discovered, with great, bulky-looking bags and sacks.

In frantic haste they seized a couple of these with a view to lightening it; but the bags were far too heavy for them to lift, and, as they tugged at them, the contents rattled and chinked unmistakably.

The bags were filled with gold and silver vessels, plate, specie, and jewels from the treasure-cave!

Carker and his companions had already made several journeys to this, and looted it of the best part of its valuable hoard.

There came the patter of naked feet immediately behind the boys, and they turned in wild alarm to behold three or four savages within as few paces of them, all with upraised spears about to spit them.

These fellows had wormed themselves in the pitchy darkness round Señora Balta and Pottle, and by a sudden rush got between them and Dick and Tom. Neither of the lads could have drawn his revolver in time to defend himself.

With a yell of terror, Tom Merritt took a headlong dive over the side of the boat into it, where he cowered prostrate upon his face, expecting every instant to feel one of those awful barbed spears tearing its way through the muscles of his neck or his backbone.

His spine in that awful moment fairly "crept," as some one has by no means inaptly described the sensation of acute suspense.

Dick had the presence of mind to throw himself prone upon the sand beside the boat, thus interposing it between him and the blacks.

Barely had he done so, when there came two rifle-shots, following so fast upon each other the reports almost sounded like one.

Dick scrambled to his knees, and, as he fumbled for his revolver, he saw over the gunwhale of the boat Pottle bound out of the darkness with clubbed piece and dash unhesitatingly at one of the two savages who were now only to be seen. Behind the mutineer came speeding Señora Balta.

One tremendous up-swing of that improvised club, and the English seaman brought it down with an awful, sickening crack upon the Papuan's skull. The hapless wretch dropped in his tracks with his head beaten into an unrecognizable pulp.

The remaining savage turned to fly, but Dick had already covered the fellow with his revolver. His finger pressed the trigger almost involuntarily—otherwise he might have been inclined to let the man go—and, shot through the body, his victim leaped into the air, then fell upon all fours dying.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DOOM OF THE MUTINEERS

UP Dick bounded; but, without a word to him, Pottle pushed with all his Herculean strength upon the boat, moving it a little.

Dick promptly lent his aid, calling to Tom to jump out. Señora Balta faced round again and pelted several shots from her revolvers at the main body of the savages, who had been emboldened by the apparent embarrassment of their foes to attempt another onrush. She drove them back once more with howls of fear, pain, and rage.

Putting forth every atom of their strength, between them the British sailor and the two lads succeeded in pushing the heavily-laden boat across the narrow strip of sand and into the water.

Hastily, then, all four whites scrambled into it, and, while Señora Balta continued to blaze away into the darkness, at nothing in particular, Pottle hastily pushed off, while the boys got out an oar each.

The boat floated free, and the lads, with a wild hurrah, pulled away for dear life, being quickly joined in their efforts by Pottle.

It was terribly hard work to row the heavily-laden boat through the water. It required more oars to

propel it with any speed, and, despite the one or two shots Señora Balta fired, arrows and spears from the baffled and infuriated savages bespattered the black, tossing water around them like raindrops.

None of the vindictive missiles, however, fell into the boat, and its occupants tugged at the oars for all they were worth, knowing the darkness must soon screen them from further attentions on the part of their foes.

All at once there floated to the ears of the fugitives a fearful tumult ashore.

They involuntarily rested on their oars and strained their eyes through the gloom, to see several quick jets of fire smite the darkness, and hear the "crack-crack" of rifles and pistols.

Carker and his companions had returned, and were battling for their lives with the savages.

"Back water, quick! Round with the boat and back to the shore," cried the chivalrous and unselfish Dick Selwyn, immediately. "We can't run off and leave them to be butchered. Quick, let us save them!"

"No, no," expostulated Señora Balta. "Leaf them to their fate. Let dem perish as they deserve. They are as much our enemies as the Papuans."

But after only a momentary hesitation and a glance at Dick, Pottle began to back water with such lusty sweeps of his oars as sent the boat, for all its heavy freight, fairly flying back, stern foremost, towards the shore.

Upon this a nondescript, shapeless mass of men could

be seen reeling to and fro. Occasionally a momentary flash of a pistol-shot lighted up a small circle of fiercely-contending white men and blacks.

Suddenly the scene became brilliantly illuminated, as some fifty or more of the fetish-priests, many of them bearing flaming torches, came rushing out of the cave, to join frenziedly in the dreadful struggle for life and death taking place on the beach.

The mutineers were now to be seen. Reduced to some three or four in number, they were striving to cleave a path in a little compact body, with repeatedly flashing revolvers and clubbed rifles, through a surging horde of savages. Now and again it looked as if they had broken through the encircling ranks; then these once more closed round and enveloped them.

"Fire into the bloodthirsty wretches, Tom—Pottle!" fairly shrieked Dick, whose gallant heart sickened with sympathetic horror at the sight of men of his own color doing battle so desperately and hopelessly against such overwhelmingly odds.

Catching up their rifles, the English sailor and the two lads opened a sharp fusilade upon the surging, howling mob ashore.

But in another minute the reënforcement of maddened fanatics from the cave overbore all opposition on the part of the unfortunate mutineers. These were swept apart, hurled this way and that, and beaten to earth, gasping out their lives beneath scores of spear and knife-thrusts.

Carker and Diaz were the last two to fall, the former with his head split in twain by a fetish-priest's sword, the latter impaled by at least three lances, which must have crossed in his body.

Overcome with horror at the scene, Pottle and the apprentices were incapable for several minutes of moving hand or foot. A sudden rush of a number of the savages down to the water's edge, and a flight of arrows and spears at the boat, awakened them to their own danger.

They had, in their noble but unavailing effort to succor the ill-starred mutineers, approached within the circle of light cast by the torches, and so offered good marks for the savages' bows and javelins.

Before they could seize their oars once more and pull away out of the illuminated radius, half a dozen arrows and spears fell into the boat. Señora Balta, who was sitting steering in the stern, sprang up with an agonized cry, and fell forward, face downward, across a thwart.

Half buried between her shoulder blades was one quivering arrow, and sticking in either shoulder were two more.

She was badly wounded, but she managed to struggle to her knees and crouch down in the bottom of the boat before the horrified Dick could spring to her assistance.

Pottle, behind that youth, growled out a fierce imprecation and wrenched free his left arm, the coat-sleeve

of which had been pinned by a spear to the oar it held.

"Oh, señora," cried Dick, in the deepest concern and distress, "you are badly hurt?"

"Never mind me!" she gasped, huskily, and speaking with an evident effort. "Row, row for your lives, or you will be all speared too!"

Pottle and Tom Merritt obeyed this injunction by bending to their oars and causing the heavy boat almost to leap over the waves. Regardless of their peril, however, Dick shipped his oar, and, rising from his seat, knelt down beside the woman.

It was too dark to see her face, for those lusty strokes of the English seaman had carried the boat out of the dangerous circle of light, but, passing his hand over her brow, Dick was horrified to feel the death-damp already upon it.

"Señora—señora, do you hear me?" he asked anxiously, fearing she had swooned, or was already gone.

"I hear you," she answered, with a painful indrawing of the breath. "Raise my head—lift me up! Ah—ah, that's better. I am dying; I know it. Where are you?"

And she groped slowly with nervous fingers for his hand, which she pressed gratefully when she grasped it.

"Braf youth—braf lads, both! The fiends, they haf done for me, and after all the years I haf ruled over them as their queen! And Diaz, he, too, has met vith his desserts! The blacks cheated me out of my revenge."

Her voice, growing weaker and weaker, died away in an incoherent murmur.

She went on rambling to herself inaudibly for another minute or two. Then suddenly she uttered an awful scream of "*Misericordia, Dios mio!*" ("Mercy, my God!") and flung out both arms wildly, almost pushing Dick from her. A great shudder shook her frame, her head fell back heavily, and she ceased to breathe.

Dick gently laid her head down when he found that she was dead, and drew the skirts of her tunic over her face.

Sadly he turned to the others and whispered that she was gone; then, seating himself again upon his thwart, he resumed his rowing.

"Can you find the schooner in the dark, Pottle?" he presently asked. "Didn't you leave any one aboard?"

"Yes—Slisberg," was the reply; "and he's showing a light on the deck now to guide us."

They rowed in silence after this towards the guiding light, and at length the dark outline of the old *Albatross* loomed up out of the night.

They ran alongside her, when a light was flashed upon them from her deck, and the voice of Slisberg called out:

"Poodle! Dank gootness! Ah! vot dis? Der boys? How—vot dis mean? Vhere der mate and oders?"

"They're all murdered by the nigs. Reckon us four

now air the sole survivors of the crew of the *Albatross*," replied his fellow mutineer.

Slisberg gasped in horror and dismay, and fell back from the rail, offering no objection to the lads coming aboard.

"Quick, boys! Aboard wi' ye!" cried Pottle. "Slisberg, cut the cable! Look alive, man! We've got to cut and run for it this time, and no mistake. Ya-as, we've got any amount of treasure here in the boat with us, but I reckon our lives are worth more than all the treasure. Guess if we don't look spry, we'll have scores of them savage chaps a-dancin' round us in their canoes."

The boys needed no further bidding. They both scrambled up the schooner's side and on to the deck—that deck they had never expected ever to tread again—and Pottle quickly followed them.

He only waited to slip the painter into Tom Merritt's hand, and bid that youth secure it, before chasing off with Dick to hoist the sails.

Slisberg ran and cut the cable, then took the wheel at the Englishman's bellowed order. And, between them, the latter and the two lads managed to get up the foresail.

The wind quickly swelled it, and the little vessel began to make way and creep out of the cove, more like a shadow ship in the inky darkness than a solid one of wood and canvas. She was soon forging smartly through the water, and Pottle and his two young as-

sistants set the mainsail as well, the Swedish seaman steering straight for the open sea.

That they had not taken their departure a moment too soon was proved the next instant by a deafening chorus of baffled and infuriated yells close upon them out of the darkness. And a flight of arrows and spears came whistling aboard, cutting ropes, passing through the sails, and sticking quivering in the deck, but otherwise doing no damage.

The vindictive savages in canoes were almost up to the schooner; but, bounding away before the fresh offshore breeze, she rapidly dropped them behind, and not another arrow or spear fell aboard.

CHAPTER XXVII

ABOARD THE "ALBATROSS" ONCE MORE

SPEEDING on, with her four occupants heaving deep sighs of relief, and towing the longboat, laden with the treasure and the dead, the schooner was at length clear of the bay and riding the deep sea waves.

"You're in command, sir," said Pottle to Dick. "Will you lay the course?"

"I'll try to, anyway," was the reply. "We are off the northeast coast of Papua, aren't we?—somewhere between it and the Admiralty Islands?"

"That's so, sir."

"Then we'll make due northwest, and so should hit the Philippines, which belong to the United States and are not so far away, thank goodness. But, first of all, we must get the longboat in, and consign poor Señora Balta's body to a watery grave."

They hove-to, therefore, and the longboat was drawn alongside under its davits. At Dick's order then, Slisberg dropped into it, and sent up, first, all the bags and sacks containing the treasure, one after the other, at the end of a rope upon which Pottle and the boys hauled.

When all the treasure had been got aboard, Señora Balta's body was reverently taken in, and Slisberg re-

joined the trio on deck and help in raising the long-boat upon its davits, and swinging it inboard.

"Now," said Dick Selwyn, "our next duty is to commit this poor lady's body to the deep. Tom, guess you'll find a prayer-book among my belongings in our old 'prentice-house, unless Carker or one of the others flung it overside. See if you can find it, while Pottle and I sew up the corpse in a spare sail. Slisberg, you take the wheel again and steer due northwest. We'll stand on, hugging the coast here, but keeping well out from it. Reckon we don't want a visit from any more Papuans."

Tom Merritt was soon back with the prayer-book which had been given to Dick by his fond mother on his leaving home upon his first voyage. And while the *Albatross* slipped along the New Guinea coast under easy sail. Dick and Pottle completed their gruesome task of enwrapping the corpse in canvas.

Then the schooner was hove-to again for a few minutes; and all four of her complement stood at the taff-rail with heads uncovered. Dick read aloud the burial service by the light of a lantern, with the body balanced by Tom and Pottle on the taff-rail, and, as he pronounced the words "We commit this body to the deep," it was suffered to fall over the stern.

As a small portable anchor, known as a kedge, had been attached to the feet of the corpse, this disappeared instantly below the waves with the splash.

They stood on again upon their course, Tom Mer-

ritt now taking the wheel, and Dick ordering Slisberg and Pottle to help him convey all the bags of treasure to the late captain's stateroom.

"I may as well tell you two, Pottle and Slisberg, here and now, before we go any further, that I intend to restore the whole of this wealth to its rightful owners in Peru," he boldly announced, "to take only the salvage the courts will award us. I am in command and—my word goes."

He pulled out a revolver and covered the two seamen with it, menacing either in turn by letting the muzzle describe a small airy circle. Slisberg fidgeted, rocked from side to side a little, and glowered darkly, then darted a quick glance at the British sailor.

Much to his surprise and the grim satisfaction of both the lads—for Tom Merritt had also promptly pulled a six-shooter and ranged himself beside Dick—Pottle said with evident sincerity and submissiveness: "Your word goes, Skipper. You command, as you say, and it's up to you, Slisberg, and me to obey orders from this on. You'll do so, Slizzy, and that without no backwash nor scowling neither, or you'll have to reckon wi' me as well as the skipper and the mate yonder, do you hear? If you don't skip lively enough when an order's given, or if you thinks to try on any hanky-panky tricks. I'll take you in hand meself, if the skipper or mate don't, and teach you not to be mootinous a second time. You can put your barkers up, young gemmen. You've nothink to fear from me any

longer. I'm in with you now heart and soul, as I told ye on the island, and I think I can answer for this swab not tryin' to cut up rough, neither."

"I'll trust you, Pottle," returned Dick. "I believe you have some good in you, and mean well by Merritt and me from now on. Listen to me, Slisberg! If you obey my orders and those of Mr. Merritt, without question or demur, and help us sail the schooner to Mindanao or one of the other Philippine Islands, I promise to do all in my power to save you and Pottle from the worst consequences of your complicity in the mutiny and the murdering of Captain Somers and the chief mate—you know what I mean. More than that, if your lives are spared by the law, I will see that an eighth part of what salvage money is awarded to Mr. Merritt and me be set aside for you, Slisberg, and another eighth part for you, Pottle. You are both bound to be sent to prison, for a time at least, I should say, for your share in the mutiny. But when you come out of prison the money will be waiting for you, and so you will be far from penniless, and, with such an excellent fresh start, it will be up to you both to make good before the end of your days. Now, what do you say, Slisberg? If you don't agree to my proposal, I shall have to put you in irons."

"I'm wid you, Mr. Selwyn. You gif der orders, ant I vill obey. I promiz, too, nod to try on any tricks. I promiz faithful."

"That's all right then." And Dick put up his pistol,

and Merritt returned to the wheel. "Now no one is to interfere with the treasure until we reach a civilized port and are able to hand it over to the proper authorities. It will remain locked up in Captain Somer's stateroom, which Mr. Merritt and I will occupy so as to keep an eye upon it."

Between them, therefore, Dick, Pottle, and the Swede transported the sacks of treasure to the stateroom, and when the last bag had been taken thither, the door was locked, and Slisberg was told to take the wheel once more.

"You go to the galley, Tom, and cook us all a jolly good meal," said Dick. "I'm about famished, and I expect the rest of you are the same."

Merritt was engaged in cooking the breakfast, when, all at once, the wind dropped and the schooner was becalmed. She rocked sluggishly upon the ocean swell, with her sails hanging limply.

All four of her complement had noticed some little time before that the air was growing more and more sultry.

"We're in for a bad blow, captain, I'm afeared," called out Pottle, coming aft to the poop steps.

Dick had stationed him in the waist, so that he might be on the lookout, as well as handy in case it was necessary to shorten sail.

"Sure! Lay aloft, Slisberg, with Pottle, at once and make all tight and snug—take in everything ex-

cept the foresail and close-reef *that*. I'll attend to the skylight and deck fittings."

Hurriedly, for their lives' sake, the two seamen scampered up the ratlines, and Dick called Tom from the galley to help him on deck.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RUNNING BEFORE THE STORM

THEY soon had everything quite all right for riding out the coming storm. Then, as the heat grew more and more intense, they were fain to cast off their coats and waistcoats, in which time they gulped down the coffee Tom Merritt had boiled and bolted the half-raw bacon and eggs, with thick slices of bread and butter.

"Eat and drink all you can, men," said Dick. "We may not be able to get another bite or sup for some time. There's no saying how long the blow may last, when it does come, or how hard a struggle we may have to keep afloat, shorthanded as we are. 'Short notice, soon past,' however, is a good old saying about storms."

The helm was partly lashed up, so that it would not require more than one pair of hands at it.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the heavens seemed to open their sluice-gates, and torrential rain fell, beating upon the decks with the rattle of hail. All had donned oilskins, topboots, and sou'westers, however, and so were only inconvenienced by the terrific pelt driving into their eyes under their peaked headgear.

A moment later a blinding flash of lightning lit up sea and sky. It was succeeded almost immediately

by a deafening peal and a prolonged "tow-row" of thunder, right over them it seemed.

Then a mighty hurricane struck the vessel on her port or landward quarters, heeling her over almost on to her beam-ends, with her weather rigging thrumming like harpstrings. Over and over she heeled before that fierce blast until it seemed inevitable that she must turn turtle and hurl her four occupants into the sea beneath her.

But they were all holding on like grim death, and Dick and Tom at the wheel pressed it hard over.

With a sidelong lurch, the schooner's head paid off, and she righted with a great jerk. Then, giving a plunge like an affrighted steed, she tore away before the gale at racer speed, almost due north, her masts bending forward and straining as if they were made of cane.

Would their mere rag of a storm foresail be blown away? If so, they would be at the mercy of wind and wave, would probably broach-to in the trough of the angry sea and be rolled over—capsized.

No, the sail held, and on and on the vessel careered wildly through the inky blackness of the night, with the sea rising higher and ever higher about her now, chasing her and bursting in clouds of foam, with mighty claps, over her taffrail.

The flashes of lightning and peals of thunder succeeded each other rapidly, and Dick Selwyn could not have made his voice heard with the frenzied roar of

the storm. But there was no need to give any orders, for nothing could be done but run blindly before the gale and trust to luck.

All four men were now gathered aft at the wheel, to which they were clinging for dear life, holding the vessel steadily on her mad course, to prevent her yawing and swerving broadside-on to the storm.

Cra-a-a-ck! Bump! Bump! Bump! Cra-a-a-ck! CRASH!

First, a loud grating, rending noise, distinctly audible even above the howl of the wind and the roaring of the sea. Then the vessel had bumped heavily three times in quick succession; and, finally, had come a terrific shock, accompanied by an awful smashing sound, and they stopped dead.

Both masts snapped off short close to the deck, with the shock, and tumbled over the port side with all their top hamper.

In awful consternation, Dick Selwyn and his three companions, peering ahead through the inky gloom, saw that they had run full tilt into a great towering wall of rock.

A vivid flash of lightning the next moment showed them a mighty perpendicular, or rather beetling, cliff standing hundreds of feet high above their shattered bows.

The vessel did not roll at all, and was plainly jammed hard and fast upon a partly submerged reef, or chain of rocks, against the very base of the precipice. But,

with the hurricane whipping the sea right aft, combers, without any exaggeration mountains high, promptly broke over the doomed craft's stern and fell with thunderous claps upon her decks, threatening to beat her to pieces in next to no time and sweeping away all the deck fittings, including the boats at their davits.

Dick Selwyn and his three companions were buried in the maw of the first watery giant to burst aboard, but they had all roped themselves to the wheel, in case of any such contingency, and so were not swept away.

As soon as they got their heads above water they hurriedly cast off the ropes that had been their preservation, then clung with might and main to the wheel as a second great billow upreared behind them.

"Try and get forward, and on to the rocks, when this wave has broken," bellowed Dick sharply. "I saw a ledge we might—"

"Reach," he was going to add, but he was not allowed time. The wave broke over them with a deafening roar, and once more they were all under water, hanging on for dear life to the wheel, with their arms and legs twisted among the ropes and each holding his breath until it seemed he could do so no longer.

As their heads again split the surface and they gulped in fresh air once more, Dick grabbed Tom Merritt, who seemed half dazed, by the left arm and plunged forward along the flooded deck, making along the port side of the cabin skylight so as to hang on to it should a third comber overtake him.

Pottle, who was in front, laid hold of him by the coat-collar, and dragged him and Tom along more quickly. They were past the skylight and clutching at the starboard bulwark, when another huge sea broke over the schooner's stern, and, surging forward in a hissing, boiling flood, washed all three of them, in a tangled heap, down the poop-ladder into the waist.

High above the awful uproar rang out a piercing scream from Slisberg.

What had befallen him they never knew, for he was not seen again. Probably he had been dashed with such violence against the skylight or a bulwark that one of his limbs was broken, and the rushing flood then whirled him over the side.

Pottle held on tightly to Dick's coat-collar, nearly strangling that gallant young fellow, who, nevertheless, as desperately clung to Tom Merritt. And thus, regaining their feet at the foot of the poop steps, up to their middles in the racing, swirling waters, they struggled for'ard again along the starboard side, past the galley, to be overtaken then by another great billow and pinned against the break of the forecastle.

The breath was nearly beaten out of their bodies, but, still holding on resolutely to one another, they scrambled pell-mell on to the forecastle-head, just as yet another pooping sea shook the vessel from end to end, and came surging for'ard after them like some ravenous monster seeking to devour them.

They tore up to the broken bows, which they saw

were pressed hard, telescoped, against the cliff-face.

"Jump! Jump!" yelled Pottle, pointing with his free hand at the ledge that Dick's keen eyes had previously descried.

It was only about three feet above where they stood, and was some four or five feet wide.

CHAPTER XXIX

A MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION

THE three took the leap together, and all landed safely, Tom Merritt, however, upon his hands and knees.

Dick and Pottle, both, at once dragged him to his feet, and then they all clung desperately to projections on the rock-face while the spent wave lapped up about and around them and strove as it were to tear them from their frail holds.

But Pottle and Dick still held on with one hand each to Tom Merritt, and the wave receded without one of them. Then the British seaman clambered up higher along a narrow, chimney-like cleft, and, stretching down a hand, dragged his companions up after him, just out of reach of the upleaping, hungry surf.

And then—then, to their utter surprise, as well as profound satisfaction, the storm passed away as suddenly as it had come—ceased as if by magic, in the startling way tropical tempests often do. Save for the great billows still breaking over the stern of the wreck and surging up against the cliff, almost reaching them at times and hammering them with clouds of stinging spray, a quietness supervened which was quite astounding after the recent uproar.

And there, perched upon the face of the great wall of rock, clinging to it still half frantically, the three survivors of the entire crew of the wrecked schooner gasped out prayers of thankfulness for their almost miraculous preservation, heaved deep sighs of relief, and breathed more freely.

Just below them floated the shattered bowsprit with its gear, still held to the vessel's stem by the bobstays. The waves dashed it repeatedly with great force against the cliff, and it was a wonder it was not smashed to chips. Slowly the storm-lashed waters began to subside, leaped with less and lesser fury against the wall of rock and ceased even to break aboard and wash the disrupted deck of the *Albatross*.

The wind had wholly dropped again.

"Heaven be praised!" panted Dick Selwyn. "We are saved for the time being anyhow. And if the sea only continues to go down we should be able to make a raft aboard the wreck, and may find some place where we can land on this islet rock. It may not be sheer cliff everywhere, and we may even find friends on it—natives who will succor us."

"I should say that it's just a barren stack of rock, sir, we've been cast upon," said Pottle, "but we can't be more than fifteen miles at the outside from the mainland of New Guinea, and, if the sea keeps calm, we ought to be able to make that ag'in."

"Oh, I've no wish to return to New Guinea, after our late experiences there," shuddered Tom Merritt.

"Better trust to being picked up by some ship at sea than going back there. We can make our raft fairly seaworthy."

"I too have no wish to return to New Guinea, to be possibly murdered and eaten by its head-hunting and cannibal inhabitants," responded Dick. "But let us hope this rock won't prove as barren as you fear, Pottle. If we can only get ashore upon it, we may be able to subsist until we can attract the attention of some passing ship. There may be cocoanuts—if nothing else—upon it. They grow everywhere in these seas, upon the most meager of soil. And I believe the natives of New Guinea often put pigs and goats to breed and fatten upon the small grass-covered islands off their coast."

The ledge was just wide and deep enough to accommodate them comfortably, and so they sat upon it, dangling their feet over the still angry surf, waiting for the dawn, which, by the fading of the stars that had just peeped out at them, they knew could not be far off.

And while they sat there, shivering, the sea subsided more and more, long oily swells taking the place of the late mountainous waves.

Day broke at last—gloriously, although the east was behind them and its dazzling sky was partly hidden by the great curtain of rock, which curved that way and to the northwest. The sea, now as placid almost as

a millpond, with the surf lapping gently against the cliff, was tinted everywhere with ruddy fire and looked like molten gold.

Our three castaways were rejoiced to note that the wrecked schooner seemed fixed immovably in its position against the cliff-face, immediately under them. Her bottom and ribs were pierced, and had been partly ripped away, by a scattered chain of semi-submerged, insulated rocks, and these helped to keep her tight pressed against the precipice, upon an almost even keel, well above the surface.

But everywhere her decks had been smashed in—plowed up—by the awful seas that had beaten upon her in the storm, short-lived as it was. For the most part her deck-beams and planking stood up at all angles, although here and there were intact portions of decking which would enable active men to scramble along from end to end of her. Not even her keel was under water.

Both her boats were gone, and a good deal of her cargo had floated out of the great holes in her deck and sides and been swept or away, or smashed and sunk against the cliff. The bowsprit and her two masts were still alongside, retained by their cordage and other gear.

“Come on! Let’s board her and make our raft,” cried Dick at once. “If we can only effect a landing on this islet, we sure should be able to salve the whole of the treasure. The cabin aft does not appear to have suffered much.”

Dropping down upon the fore-castle-head, which was practically uninjured beyond the shattered, stove-in bows, the shipwrecked trio made their way, first to the deckhouse, containing the galley and the carpenter's and the boatswain's stores.

"We'll have to hurry up with our raft, sir," remarked Pottle, "in case any of the natives discover the wreck. Once they do, we'll have a swarm of 'em buzzing around in next to no time, when it may go very hard with us."

"Sure. So *my* first care will be to secure all the arms and ammunition I can," replied Dick. "I'll go on to the cabin therefore, while you get the carpenter's tools, Pottle; and you, Tom, enough food and drink to take with us."

Accordingly, he hurried on aft, and dived down into the saloon. He found that what little water had entered it through the shattered fore-bulkhead had drained away, the tide being at the ebb; and the apartment, as well as the cabins or staterooms opening off it, were none the worse for the storm.

He secured all five rifles that had been aboard, with ample ammunition for the weapons, as well as two revolvers, which Carker must have left behind.

With the four six-shooters he himself and Tom Merritt had, and the late Señora Balta's two, they would, therefore, possess eight revolvers.

Loading himself with all the arms, and as much of

the ammunition for both kinds of weapons as he could conveniently carry, he did not interfere with any of the treasure—hardly glanced at the bags containing it—but hastened back to the galley.

CHAPTER XXX

THE INLET AND THE STAIRWAY

FORTUNATE indeed was it for them that, being strongly bolted to the main deck and sheltered somewhat by the poop and the stump of the mainmast from the seas that had broken aboard, the deckhouse was still standing, and had not even been breached anywhere.

Pottle had flung two booms, attached to ropes, over the starboard side, and, suspended therefrom himself on a rope-ladder, had lashed a couple of the loose deck planks across them at either end, binding them together in the shape of a hollow square, and giving him a footing upon them.

Tom Merritt was piling the threshold of the galley with all the food it contained, stuffed into pots and pans and kettles, which would come in very useful, as he knew, if they could effect a landing anywhere round the cliffs.

"That's the ticket, Tom!" cried Dick. "No sign yet of any natives, thank goodness! Keep an eye out for any while you work. I'm going to lend Pottle a hand now in building the raft. When you've got all the food in the galley, fetch out what tools you can from the carpenter's shop."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Tom, saluting in playful

mockery. "With the arms we've now got, we sure can hold off any small party of natives."

Dick wrenched away some more deck planks and handed them over the side to Pottle; then joined the latter with a couple of hammers and a bag of long nails. And the two proceeded to board over the square framework of their raft.

They soon had it staunch and true; and then they loaded it with all the arms and ammunition, and the food and tools that Merritt had procured, as well as a big barrel of fresh water.

All three of them then embarked; and, casting off from the wreck, Pottle and Dick worked their cumbersome craft with long sweeps, fitted through looplevelines at either side of it, round the southern bulge of the cliffs. Tom Merritt steered with another sweep at the stern, and also stood ready to fend them off from the cliff-face or any insulated rock in their path.

As the cliff wall they were skirting began to curve to the northeast, they came upon a narrow cleft splitting the mighty stack from its base to its summit.

"Heaven send we'll find a landing-place in here," said Dick.

The cleft was barely wide enough to allow the entry of their big, clumsy craft, and Dick and Pottle had to ship their sweeps and draw it in by clawing the rock walls on either hand. But just within, the inlet widened considerably and took a sharp turn to the left into a little landlocked gulf.

And then a unanimous cry of profound astonishment burst from the lips of all three castaways, at sight of a great flight of narrow, steep steps ascending from a small level ledge of rock, which formed a natural landing-place.

The steps, or stairs, were rudely hewn out of the solid rock, and mounted to the very top of the stack in a perfectly straight line, without a break or a turn anywhere. There must have been over a hundred of them at least.

But after that first amazed outburst, Dick Selwyn and his companions were silent, their minds busy with conjectures as to what that great rock stairway portended.

"The place must be inhabited, sure," gasped Tom Merritt, the first to find his voice again.

"Yes. I should say it is a sacred isle, and that we will find a Tambu-house, or temple, on the summit, in charge of some native priests," said Dick. "If so it may be a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire. They may resent our intrusion."

"We'll put up a stiff fight afore they take us prisoners," growled Pottle.

And he hurriedly reached for one of the rifles, the while he anxiously scanned the top of the stairway and the rim of rock shutting them in.

Tom Merritt also seized a rifle; Dick followed suit, and all three, as the raft gently rubbed the side of the landing-place, studied the clifftops over them.

But no human figures showed against the skyline, no angry outcry or shrill whistle broke the brooding silence of the place; and, somewhat emboldened, Pottle leaped on to the landing-place with a rope and moored the raft to a couple of stout wooden posts imbedded in the rock.

"There sure can't be any one on the watch," whispered Tom Merritt, "or we must have been discovered before this."

"Sure! Come on, we'll go up, and learn if there be any one at home. We must risk an encounter with angry native priests, or whoever inhabits the place. Load your rifles to the full. And Pottle, take these two revolvers I found on the schooner. You can have them. Merritt and I have three each, as you know."

The British seaman also thrust an ax into his belt. Then, removing their big sea-boots, at Tom's suggestion, so as to make as little noise as possible on the hard rock, they crept like specters, one after the other, up the narrow stairway.

Dick insisted on going first, as commander; Pottle went second; and Tom brought up the rear. And as they mounted, the first two kept their eyes glued upon the skyline, and Tom ranged his eyes alternately aloft and to the mouth of the little inlet below, in case a canoe came into it and took them in the rear.

The stairs were exceedingly steep, and it was a tiring climb for the shipwrecked trio, cumbered as they were with their oilskins and already pretty well

exhausted by what they had been through and their lack of sleep.

No one appeared on the cliffs above them, nor yet invaded the inlet below, and at length Dick Selwyn, somewhat out of breath and with his knees aching and giving under him, reached the top step and saw before him a low, narrow pass or ravine about thirty feet long, leading at a gentle upward slope on to the summit of the island.

The sides of this little ravine were not more than fifteen feet high anywhere, and gradually lessened in height with the upward slope of its bottom until they touched the plateau beyond. Evidently human hands had also excavated it, or at least had improved upon it, to save the labor of cutting more stairs.

Passing along it, still warily glancing from side to side, to guard against walking into any ambush, our three friends debouched on to the open plateau, and found that they could look all around the top of the mighty stack.

CHAPTER XXXI

DICK'S HAPPY IDEA

THE plateau was roughly circular in shape and fairly level, the end they were at being somewhat lower than the farther or northern end. Everywhere it was covered thickly with grass; and dotted here and there over the parklike expanse were little groves of cocoanut palms and other trees.

Dick Selwyn calculated it would be about eight acres in extent, even as his eyes ranged quickly and keenly everywhere in quest of a Tambu-house or other native dwelling.

But none such greeted their eyes, and, owing to the non-existence of any brushwood or undergrowth, they were able to see everywhere, even through the scattered groves of trees. On the western side was a small lake, in a basin-like depression to the ground.

"There doesn't seem to be any habitation or any one here," Pottle was beginning, when Tom Merritt pointed to the eastward, crying out:

"Look! Look! Two great droves of pigs. And—and goats also!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Dick. "Pigs and goats and water—that lake is sure fresh water—and no sign of any human being. Reckon the natives on the main-

land opposite keep the animals here, as I said, to breed and fatten, and come only occasionally to round them up. There's no one living here; that seems pretty plain. So we'll take possession, and if the owners of the goats and pigs come while we're here, we'll harangue them from the top of the stairway and make them sell us the animals."

"They'll attack us as interlopers," said Tom Merritt.

"Let them. We sure ought to be able to hold an island fortress like this against any number of half-armed savages with the arms and ammunition we've got. I believe the cliffs are unscalable everywhere, on account of the natives making that stairway. They would never have taken the trouble, had it not been necessary."

They went to the edge of the southern cliffs, and looked over.

"No sign of any native craft, nor, alas! of any vessel that might take us off," said Tom Merritt. "The natives have not yet discovered the wreck, that's evident; so we ought to get ashore all we can from it as soon as possible."

"We'll do that," said Dick. "But see here! we are looking right down on the wreck. What is there to prevent us rigging up a derrick here on the cliff and hoisting things up? For that matter, we could let you down here Pottle, Tom and I, on a 'boatswain's chair' or some similar contrivance, and haul you up again when you had sent up the goods."

"A rattling good idea, Mr. Selwyn!" cried the sailor. "It would save no end of time, and labor too—the running up and down those stairs with the things, as well as making trip after trip on the raft."

"A rattling good idea, indeed," crowed Tom Merritt. "And we can haul up the contents of the raft in the same way from the cliff besides the stairs. We've got the material for rigging up a derrick in the raft itself. That big coil of rope we brought away at the last moment will run to more than the height of the cliffs here, I should say. They can't be more than a hundred and fifty feet high at the outside."

"Up their outside, you mean, Tom," laughed Dick. "Yes, that coil of rope should be quite long enough, and stout enough, too, for our purpose. It will bear your weight all right, Pottle, sure."

"Let us rig up our derrick at once then, young gentlemen, over the stairway. Thank my stars, I shan't have to keep running up and down them steps. To do it a couple of times more 'ud knock me up, I'm sartin."

The boys, too, were greatly pleased to think that they would not have to go up and down the stairs repeatedly with heavy loads.

"We'll get up everything from the raft first," said Dick. "Then, reckon we ought to have some breakfast. I'm beginning to feel a bit faint from emptiness. We'll unload everything on to the landing-place, break up the raft, carry up what spars and tackle we need and rig up our derrick right away over the stairs."

Accordingly, they all three descended to the landing-place, and proceeded to unload their raft and take it to pieces. They then divided the arms, the ammunition, and some of the tools among them, and, with the coil of rope and two of the deck planks, reclinbed the stairs, Pottle and Dick carrying the planks on their shoulders.

On the verge of the cliff beside the stairway, they sawed one of the planks into three pieces, hammered two of these well into the ground a couple of feet apart and nailed the third piece across them. Then a hole was bored near one end of the second plank, which was set at an angle of forty-five degrees overhanging the landing-place and nailed thus, as well as lashed with spare cord, to the crosspiece.

A rude derrick was thus made, and it only remained for them to pass the rope through the eye, or hole, in the plank serving as the leg. Dick it was then decided should go down and send up the things, and needless perhaps to say, he took a rifle and a revolver with him in case he should be surprised by any natives.

But, from their lofty position on the top of the cliffs, Pottle and Tom should be able to see any "lakatoi," or canoes, coming to the island, and so give him timely warning.

No natives nor any one else came, and he was able to send up everything they had brought ashore without interruption.

He then mounted the stairs once more rejoining his

companions; and now they were all three glad to take shelter within the little ravine from the broiling sun and eat some of the canned meat, bread and preserved vegetables that Tom Merritt had found in the galley of the wreck. They washed down this fare with lime-juice, mixed with water, that Pottle brought from the little lake in a kettle, and finished up with dessert in the shape of some ripe bananas he had found growing in the grove.

From where they sat at the top of the stairway they could look right down this and see any craft that might come in at the cleft in the rock wall.

"We'll rig up a flag of distress at the northern end of the island," said Dick, "in the hope that some passing ship may spy it, and come and take us off. And tell you what! we'll roof over this little ravine for a dwelling. Do you get me? Here are two straight rock walls shutting us in. All we'll have to do is to put up a roof, and board in both ends, fitting doors, of course; and there you are—we've got our house. And what's more; from within it we can command the stairs and the inlet below, and prevent any intruders coming up."

CHAPTER XXXII

BUILDING "RAVINE HOUSE"

"BULLY for you, Dick!" fairly shouted Tom Merritt. "That's a glorious idea. We should be impregnable then, indeed. We could bid defiance to any number of natives who might attack us. None of them could get up the stairway in the face of our fire; and we can make our front wall arrow and spear proof. Let us start fortifying the ravine right away."

"It would be just as well if we did, Mr. Selwyn," nodded Pottle. "There's no saying when the owners of these pigs and goats may come; and if you pay them to go away—pay them with some of the treasure, as I expect you mean to do—that will only make them come back in greater numbers. There's no trusting these blacks, you know. Once they know we've got gold and silver things, especially such beautiful things as are in them sacks in the wreck, we'll have to fight for our lives against an army."

"That's so," rather ruefully agreed Dick. "But I can't appropriate the pigs and goats. *That* would be theft. I must make their owners *some* payment in kind, and there's only the treasure to use for that purpose. The rightful owners of the treasure, for their

part, cannot complain because we use some of it to preserve our lives and save the greater portion of it for them. Yes, it would sure be best to barricade this end of the ravine straightway, and then to lose no time in getting up the treasure from the wreck, as well as whatever we need."

So they forthwith blocked up the head of the stairway with all the remaining material that had formed their raft, increasing the rude barricade by adding what loose bowlders they could find.

Then, feeling much refreshed by their meal, they removed their primitive derrick to the southwestern cliffs, set it up immediately over the wreck below. Another plank was sawn in two, and one portion was made into what is called a "boatswain's chair." That is, it was suspended by slings at either end of the hauling-rope to form a seat for Pottle, who was securely lashed around the body to both the slings as well as to the board, so that he could not fall or slip off it.

Dick and Tom then, passing their end of the hauling-rope a couple of times around the crosspiece to which the projecting leg was attached, slowly and steadily lowered him down the face of the cliff.

As soon as his feet touched the forecastle-head below, he cast off the ropes that bound him, and ran aft to the saloon.

Within a few moments he reappeared from the cabin hatch, staggering under one of the sacks of treasure.

This was safely hauled up the cliff face by Dick and Tom, while he went off to fetch another.

Before long every one of the bags of treasure had been got up. And now, shouting up that he was not a bit tired, the British sailor sent up spars and planks, as well as occasionally, in between these loads, barrels and boxes, either of provisions or containing such odds and ends as he deemed would be useful to them, if they were stuck on the islet rock for any length of time.

By sunset, therefore, they had got up a tremendous amount of stuff—quite enough material to turn the ravine into a fortified dwelling, besides stock and furnish it fairly comfortably. Chairs, tables, chests, hammocks, and other conveniences too numerous and varied to mention, had been got up.

So now, just as the sun's rim was sinking below the western horizon, Pottle tied himself firmly upon his boatswain's chair again, and fended himself off from the face of the precipice as Dick and Tom hauled him up.

"We'll not do anything more to-night," said Dick. "We can't very well in the dark for one thing, and a light might attract the attention of the natives on the mainland and bring them down upon us. And for another thing we are all three pretty well deadbeat after our exertions. We'll just have supper and get to bed. No one is likely to come in the dark, and so I don't think we need set watches."

The night passed without their being intruded upon

in any way, and the first peep of dawn saw them up and about, thoroughly refreshed and reinvigorated after a good, long sleep.

While Tom Merritt cooked them an appetizing breakfast, Dick and Pottle started to board up the stair-end of the ravine—to construct the front wall of their house.

The pair first made two holes, about a foot deep in either case, opposite each other in the rocky walls of the ravine, at a height of three feet from the ground, and fitted into them a stout spar, sawn to the required length—some twelve feet. Wedging the spar tightly in either hole with broken pieces of rock, mud, and plugs of wood, they then put another beam immediately above it across the top of the ravine.

This second spar they nailed in place, to two strong posts set vertically against either rocky wall and driven a foot deep into the ground; and likewise nailed it to the lower cross-beam.

A third spar was fixed in either rocky wall midway between the first two spars; and then it was comparatively easy work, after breakfast, for all three cast-aways to nail on planks in two tiers, so as to completely board up the entrance to the ravine—that is the entrance from the stairs, of course.

Needless to say, they left a space in the middle of the lower tier of planks for a doorway, and then they fitted in it the galley-door, which was among the many things

Pottle had collected from the wreck, overnight. He had left the hinges and the lock, upon it; and so all they had to do was screw the hinges to one doorpost and the box of the lock to the other.

Next they tackled the roof. Constructing four great triangles of wood, they set these up at regular intervals on their bases spanning the ravine, fixing them firmly upright by nailing them to posts set against the rock walls and imbedded a foot or so in the ground.

It was dinner time before they had done all this. But only waiting to snatch a hasty meal, they finished the roof by nailing on weather-boarding—that is, planks slightly overlapping one another so as to prevent rain penetrating between them.

“And now for the rear wall,” said Dick Selwyn after tea. “We ought to be able to get it up also before dark. But we’ll probably have to postpone putting in our windows until to-morrow.”

They had also to postpone fitting the cabin door as their rear entrance.

Again they lay down with the setting of the sun—this time, however, behind a strong and locked door—and enjoyed an uninterrupted sleep all night, the dawn seeing them again hard at work.

They had brought away six sidelights, the glass of which they had found intact, from the wreck; and three of these they fitted in the front gable of their dwelling. Overnight they had left a space above their

front wall—the triangular space between this and the roof, of course. And the same in the rear gable-end.

These two gables were now boarded up in turn, and fitted with three circular windows or port-holes apiece; when the house was practically finished.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FORTIFYING THEIR DWELLING

A WEEK and more rolled by, and still no natives came to disturb them. In that time they had most strongly fortified their strange dwelling, which they named Ravine House, by piling sods of turf, one above another, close against not only their front and back walls but also against their peaked roof, which last was therefore completely buried under ground as it were.

"If at any time any savages were able to scale the cliffs and attacked us from the pleateau, they would be unable to set our roof on fire with the sods of turf banked against it and covering it," Dick Selwyn had remarked, in proposing the adoption of that device.

Loopholes had been made in the roof that they could fire out through it if necessary; and an upper floor had been erected, so that the roof formed a cockloft in which they could kneel for that purpose, two ladders, one at either end of the living-room, giving ready access to it.

As the front door had been set three feet above the level of the ground, steps were fixed outside and also within. And over each of the three windows in

the front gable, and likewise over the three in the back, stout arrow-proof shutters were hung up outside, horizontally, by cords passing through the wall behind; which cords could instantly be released so as to allow of the shutter dropping and covering the window.

All the windows, need it be said, opened inward.

And the interior of the odd little ravine-house had been made as cozy and comfortable as possible. There was a carpet on the rocky floor, as also rugs—obtained of course from the schooner's saloon; there were tables and chair and hammocks, a cooking-stove, shelves, and cabinets, and chests.

The wreck, however, had gone wholly to pieces—that is what they had left of it—two days before in another tremendous storm, which had lasted three whole days and nights; during which time they had not been able or cared to stir out of doors.

They had sat and played cards, draughts, and chess, listening to the roar of the angry elements without, “jolly thankful,” as Tom Merritt said, that they had such a snug little place of it.

“It’s the rainy season setting in,” observed Dick Selwyn. “We may look now at any moment for the coming of the owners of the pigs and goats, I reckon. The natives sure won’t want to leave the animals here exposed to all its severities. I’m surprised they haven’t been already—didn’t come immediately after the storm.”

“They probably want to make sure they won’t be

caught out at sea or be weather-bound—left stranded—here by bad weather,” rejoined Pottle.

About the middle of the forenoon on the following day, the trio were milking some of the goats, which they had driven inside a pent that they had constructed, railing off the south-eastern corner of the island. Tom Merritt happened to cast his eyes seaward, and at once shouted excitedly, pointing southeast at the same time:

“Look! Look! Lakatois making for the inlet. Several of them.”

Dick Selwyn and Pottle sprang up from their milking-stools, almost upsetting the pails of milk, and glanced sharply in the direction he indicated. They saw six large lakatois, or Papuan ships, about half a mile away but heading directly, apparently, toward them. Each craft was towing three or four canoes behind it.

“Quick to Ravine House!” cried Dick. “Bring the pails of milk along.” They hurried out of the gate of the pen, each carrying a pail of milk; and, skirting the roof of their ravine dwelling, entered it, of course, by the back door.

They would have had to drop fifteen feet, the depth of the ravine, to get in by their front entrance, as the reader may remember.

And it may as well be mentioned here that they had regularly milked some of the goats within the past week, and made cheese of what milk they did not drink.

“Collect all the arms and a good supply of ammuni-

tion," said Dick, as he locked and bolted the backdoor behind them—not that he expected any attack would or could be made upon their rear, at least straightaway, but simply as a measure of precaution. "I may be able, and I hope, to bribe them to go away and leave us in peace, as I have so often said, but I may not. We may have a big fight—may have to beat them off."

He went at once himself to a big cupboard, or rather a little strong-room, they had made by boarding off one of the rear corners of their house. Inside it, always under lock and key in case they ever had undesirable visitors, all the bags of treasure were kept.

He drew out one of the smaller bags, which he knew contained about a thousand dollars in Peruvian libras or gold coins, and took it to the front door. This was not only locked, but had no less than three strong iron bolts shot upon it. It could also be secured by two chains, and three stout wooden beams inserted in iron sockets screwed on to the jambs.

He had a magazine rifle in his left hand, and a brace of revolvers in his belt, which was heavy with pistol cartridges, while slung over his shoulder was a bandolier, also fully loaded—with rifle shells. All three castaways never left Ravine House to rove over the island without being thus armed, lest they should be surprised by a visit from natives or bad whites.

Opening the front door, he seated himself on a chair he drew to it, and was promptly joined at it by Tom and Pottle, not only similarly armed but also now carry-

ing their two spare rifles and two additional revolvers, as well as a couple of extra bandoliers apiece.

"I'll offer them a thousand dollars in gold specie," said Dick. "That ought to be ample, for if we quitted to-morrow we should leave them all their pigs and goats, which are not worth so very much amongst them, after all, being so common and numerous. If they won't leave us in peace for that sum, they can do their worst. I don't consider I should be justified in paying away more of the money, seeing it really is not mine to do what I like with."

"They ought to consider themselves well paid, the dirty niggers," snorted Pottle. "I'd tell 'em to go to the deuce, if I'd my way."

In the strong-room behind them was nearly the whole of the original pirates' ill-gotten hoard, for Carker and his fellow mutineers had practically cleared out the treasure-cave before the last ill-starred journey to it. They had not got the golden image which the Papuans had worshiped as their chief fetish, of course; but they had all the others, and the best part of the jewelry, plate, and specie.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TREACHEROUS ATTACK

IT was not so very long before our three friends heard the natives calling to one another outside the inlet; and shortly afterwards a canoe thrust its nose round the projecting spur and came in, quickly followed by another and another.

There were some four or five natives in each—lithe, muscular, active-looking men with next to no clothing, practically, only necklaces of beads or shark's teeth, and other rude ornaments upon them. Nearly all had the hair shaven from the top of the forehead, and bushed out over the shoulders like great wigs.

One or two of them, evidently chiefs, had feather headgear not unlike at a distance the furry or laced three-cornered hats worn in the army at the time of our War of Independence.

All carried spears some seven or eight feet long, and had bows and the great heavy six-foot long arrows used by their race slung upon their backs. Being continually engaged in hostilities among themselves, owing to tribal differences and jealousies, as well as being pirates ever on the lookout for prey upon their voyages, these Papuan seafarers are always prepared for battle.

Dick Selwyn at once stepped out of the door of Ravine House, and shouted down to these first comers:

"Stay where you are! Can any of you speak English?"

The natives all started as if they had been stung, and turned surprised startled faces up at him, for a moment there was dead silence.

They had all been jabbering like magpies, and now seemed electrified—as well they might be, at sight of the strongly built house blocking up the ravine.

Then, as most of them clutched at their bows to unsling them, scowling upward with truculent resentment, one of their number—a chief wearing one of the feathery headdresses—cried out some order, and all became motionless again, the while, however, other canoes came nosing round the spur.

"Me speak fine goot English," the chief next called out. "Who you, and what you doing on dis island?"

"You the owner of the pigs and goats on it?" asked Dick.

"Dey be propetty ob our king, Amfoosa," was the reply. "But me big chief, nex' to king. What you doing here?"

"We were wrecked on the rock, and got up here. We will pay your king for the pigs and goats on it, if you go away and leave us in peace until we can get off it."

"What you pay?"

"Know anything of American money? I will pay you a thousand dollars in South American gold."

The chief was plainly astonished at the generosity of the offer; but a crafty look overspread his face the next instant, and he called back:

"Not 'nuff. King Amfoosa want more dan dat for him pigs and goats."

"He'll get no more from us. I will lower the money to you in a bag at the end of a rope, if you will promise to go away then and not come back."

"Ve vill come oop."

"No, you won't. Stay where you are, or it is war between us. Will you take the thousand dollars and promise to leave us in peace—not to come back again until the rains are over?"

"How many ob you? A thousand doll's not mooch from so many ob you."

"It doesn't matter how many there are of us. Will you take the money and go away until the rains are over?"

The chief said something in lowered tones to his followers, then answered:

"Me must fust ask King. Me cannot decide."

His last word was uttered in a loud, ringing tone; and, as if it were a signal, several of the warriors around him swiftly fitted war-arrows, which they had stealthily withdrawn to their bows and aimed upward at the trio in the doorway of Ravine House.

But quick as they were, Dick and his companions

were quicker. They had kept their eyes carefully upon all the savages within the inlet, and before one of the long shafts could be shot, Dick had bounded back within the doorway, and Tom Merritt slammed it to and turned the key in the lock, while Pottle thrust his rifle out through one of the loopholes beside it.

There were a dozen dull thuds outside, accompanied by three loud splintering cracks, and three triple-barbed arrow-heads, made of bone, came almost half-way through the upper panels of the door, just above Tom's head.

All the other shafts, less well aimed in the hurry, had imbedded themselves harmlessly in the sods of turf stacked up against the outside of the front wall. The whole of this had been thus protected, except for the door and three windows, the reader will recall.

"Don't touch those shafts—on your lives! Leave them. The points may be poisoned," cried Dick, as he hurriedly thrust *his* rifle out through a loophole. "Never mind the door, Tom. Fire out on them!"

Pottle's rifle cracked even as he spoke, and a shriek answered it.

Looking through his loophole, Dick Selwyn saw a dozen or more of the savages bounding like wild-goats up the stairway, brandishing spears and war-clubs or tomahawks, and the fellows in the canoes urging their craft alongside the landing-place and springing on to this.

Pottle had shot down one of the first to get ashore,

and the luckless wretch's sprawling and writhing body somewhat incommoded those who came after him, at the foot of the narrow stair.

But the warriors on this were coming up three steps at a stride. It was no time for any further attempt at a parley, or for any qualms or scruples.

Dick Selwyn fired at the foremost man, and simultaneously Pottle also shot at him. He gave an awful cry, as both bullets passed through his body, and, stumbling blindly forward in his leap, pitched head first off the stairway.

With arms and legs outstretched, he fell upon the heads of the occupants of one of the canoes. The craft at once turned turtle, spilling him and its crew into the water.

Again Dick and Pottle shot, this time choosing different targets, and the two leading warriors fell with howls of pain, one of them falling off the stairway, as the first man had done, on to the heads of those below and the other dropping on all fours on the steps, blocking the passage.

Tom Merritt now joined in the fusilade, and three more of the savages on the stairway fell, increasing the confusion and barrier upon it.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ENEMY REPULSED

It was as if pandemonium had broken loose in that rock-walled pit, what with the rapid firing of the three in the hut and the ferocious yelling or agonized screaming of the savages.

The four wounded warriors, all more or less incapacitated, lying on the narrow stair about a fourth of the way up, prevented the rest from getting past. But they would be soon thrust aside, if not trodden under foot.

"Cease firing!" bawled Dick. Then he shouted through his loophole: "Call off your men, chief, if you are wise, and go."

His voice rang above the uproar, and the chief, who, to be just, was among the foremost pressing up the stairs, heard the words. As prudent as he was evidently brave, if treacherous and cunning like most of his race, the chief now shouted something which hushed the yelling.

The Papuans crowding on to the landing-place, and at the foot of the steps, turned without demur and leaped back into their canoes; those on the stairway behind the chief began to descend again; while those around him took up their four wounded comrades and likewise retreated, with him.

Savages in every quarter of the globe will never persevere or persist in an attack in which they are getting the worst of it. They will not continue fighting unless all the advantages are on their side.

The Red Indian of our own country invariably turned and fled if he lost heavily at the outset.

"Ve vill go back to our King, and he vill come with a thousand warriors and more and destroy you—unless you pay more dan you offer me," the chief shouted, boldly and defiantly descending last of all and some steps behind his men.

Dick answered nothing. It would have been futile to do so. He merely again bade Pottle and Tom to hold their fire.

Tumbling into their canoes, the savages went off, the chief as *his* craft was disappearing round the spur, turning and shaking his spear threateningly at his unseen foes above.

"They'll come back right enough, greatly reënforced—by every man in the tribe, I expect," growled Pottle. "And they'll come in the dark. This scrimmage ain't nothing to what our next un'll be like."

"Sure," agreed Dick, gloomily. "We'll have to put our thinking caps on to find ways and means of keeping them at bay. I'm going out the back way now, to see whether they clear off or mean to try a second attack. You two stay here, in case they come back suddenly."

But the chief was satisfied that he could not hope to dislodge the well-entrenched whites with the force at

his disposal, and Dick from the spur of rock beside the inlet saw all six lakatois standing away from the islet under full sail; as soon, that is, as they had taken aboard the crew of the canoes.

They went off under full sail—at their fastest—due southeast, the way they had come. They had beaten up against the wind in coming, but now they had it right behind them, and so scudded along.

Dick therefore went back and fetched his companions, and the trio watched the vessels until these were hull down upon the horizon.

“Now,” said the young commander, as they turned to retrace their steps to the house, “it’s up to us to make good use of the time before they return. As you said, Pottle, they’ll sure come in the night. I’ve been thinking while watching them go, and I reckon our first move should be to strew the stairway, all the way up, *with plenty of tin tacks.*”

“Bully!” shouted Tom Merritt, admiringly. And Pottle grinned, and nodded vigorously.

“We’ll also rig up a spring-gun,” went on Dick. “We can spare two revolvers. We’ll put one, with just a couple of shots in it, at the top of the steps, immediately outside our front door, and, attaching a cord to the trigger, take the cord down the stairs and tie it to some big bowlders with which we will block the first step. Of course, we will tie the string to the bowlders, first of all, and we’d better black it so that the sharp eyes of the natives won’t be so likely to see it.”

"Grand!" cried Tom Merritt.

Forthwith, therefore, they took out a ball of twine, and blacked it by rubbing it all over with soot from their stove chimney. Then they brought in half a dozen of the handiest bowlders, or fragments of rock, they could find in the continuation of the ravine at the back of the house, and carried these, one by one, in their arms, down the stairway.

Looping the twine well around each bowlder, and piling all the rocky fragments on top of one another on the lowermost step, in such a way that no one could possibly climb over them without disturbing them and causing one or two at least to roll over into the water, they re-climbed the stairs, letting the ball of twine run out. Finally, they tied the loose end of the twine to the trigger of a revolver, which they suspended, barrel uppermost, outside their front wall.

That done, they took a large packet of tin tacks down the stairs; and Dick liberally bestrewed each step as he slowly reascended, Tom and Pottle, beside him, making sure that a goodly number of the tacks everywhere stood business-end upward.

"And now," said Dick, when they had completed this task, "reckon the next thing we had better do, before having dinner, is to put another spring-gun at that place on the east cliff where we thought it possible, you'll remember, for a good climber to get up. Many of these Papuans, we mustn't forget, are like monkeys at climbing: no white man, who was ever born, is in it with them.

We don't want to be surprised by an attack in the rear or on the roof while we are hotly engaged in holding the stairs.

"Reckon not, indeed," shuddered Tom.

They had more than once made a complete circuit of the plateau, to see if it were possible for any savages to scale the cliffs, and at the spot Dick referred to—a little bight—had thought that a good climber might be able to get up. The cliff at the point was much broken and sloped inward somewhat at a greater or less angle.

So, taking a second ball of twine, black like the first, and another pistol, charged in two chambers—no more, lest the savages should get hold of it and be able to use it against them—they proceeded to the spot.

They carried the twine right round the little bight or bay, looping it tightly at intervals about broken branches of trees they thrust into the ground. The twine was stretched at about a foot above the earth, but with the long grass all about, it was not likely to be detected at night.

Again, the loose end of the twine was attached to the trigger of the revolver, which was tied to another branch, stuck in the ground a little farther inland.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ATTACK BY NIGHT

"WELL, reckon we've taken all the precautions we very well can," said Dick complacently, as they returned to the house. "We'll have dinner now—a jolly good feed; and then I think the best thing we can do is set a sentry on the Spur, while two of us lie down and get what sleep they may this afternoon. We may be kept awake all night, don't forget."

This proposal was also acted on, Pottle electing for first "sentry-go," and Dick and Tom turning into their hammocks—lying down in their shirts and trousers.

At tea-time Pottle called Tom Merritt, who took his place on the Spur, Dick making the tea. Then, when all had eaten and drunk, Pottle turned in and Dick joined Tom on the lookout.

When darkness fell, the two boys returned to the house, and Tom lay down again. Pottle was still asleep.

Dick, who was to watch until midnight, sat down on a chair at one of the front loopholes, and from time to time looked down the stairway. He could just discern the narrow opening of the inlet: it was too dark to discern much else.

He was armed to the teeth, of course; and beside him the front door was locked, bolted, and barred, so

that nothing short of a battering-ram or an ax could force an entry. The backdoor was similarly secured.

It was a weary and nerve-racking vigil, as well as a lonely one. Repeatedly he thought he saw something coming in the opening of the inlet, or fancied the wash of the water against the landing-place or the beat of the surf outside the Spur was the noise of men creeping up the stairs.

How horribly—maddeningly—slowly the hours dragged by!

The hands of the clock that they had brought ashore from the captain's cabin, aboard the wrecked *Albatross*, were pointing to five minutes to twelve, when BANG! went the pistol outside the door.

Even as Dick sprang to his feet, and Tom and Pottle started up in their hammocks, *bang!* went the second chamber of the weapon.

Dick looked forth, and was able to make out a swarm of dark figures clustered beyond the piled-up bowlders on the bottom step, and the mouth of the inlet, at the water-level, black with canoes pressing in.

The moon, which had been clouded over until a short time before, was now riding high and clear in the heavens and shining directly upon the stairway, lighting it up almost from top to bottom, while leaving the gulf beside it in deep shadow. For the savages it was an ill-timed moment to attack, but probably they had made all their arrangements in anticipation of the moon remaining clouded.

"They've come again, right enough," cried Dick Selwyn, "but we'll hold our fire for the nonce, and see what the tin-tacks will do."

Splash! splash! splash! The leading assailants hastily bundled all the bowlders off the stairway into the water alongside, and, with a united yell, rushed on to the steps.

All their fellows promptly took up the yelling. But it was just as promptly interlarded with piercing yelps of pain, the most doleful howls, and the invaders of the stairs began capering and hopping about in the most ludicrous way, now on one leg, now on the other, and contorting their bodies as they never did in any war-dance.

At any other time the three whites, who were now each at a loophole, peering forth, with rifles ready, would have laughed heartily at the spectacle below.

A general retreat was once made by all the warriors on the steps, and that so unexpectedly and so disorderly that many of their comrades crowding the landing-place were thrust off it into the water. Everything was wild confusion and clamor for the next couple of moments, the frenzied, defiant yelling ceasing instantly with the new, excited shouts that went up.

"Fire into them now!" shouted Dick, "and try and create a panic."

Thrusting out their rifle-barrels, the three besieged fired a volley down the stairway at the dense, seething mob on the landing-place. Screams of mortal anguish

mingled with the echoes from the walls around. At the short range, close massed as the Papuan warriors were, every one of the bullets passed clean through one man and struck down another behind.

"Rapid fire!" yelled Dick. "Pepper the canoes as well."

Quickly wrenching back the bolts of their pieces, ejecting the spent cartridges, then slamming the bolts back again, all three whites blazed away as fast as they could, shooting, now straight down the stairway, now at the densely packed canoes, which last formed a shapeless, moving blur, darker than the background.

Under the incessant leaden sleet, beneath which sometimes even three men fell to one shot, the savages broke like sheep, and either flung themselves off the landing-place into the water or fought like wildcats to get out of the inlet. Canoes were upset or sunk in the mad stampede and struggle to escape. And in pity, having no wish to kill or injure more of the poor misguided wretches than he could help, Dick Selwyn called out to his companions to cease firing, and held his own shot.

The scene below in the inlet-mouth during the next few moments was indescribable. It was worse than any panic in a theater after some fool has called out "fire."

Some of the savages actually scrambled over the heads and shoulders of those in the near canoes to reach the farther craft; and what with the howling

and loud splashing the uproar was appalling. At last, however, such of the canoes as had not sunk bodily, beneath the weight of the numbers that had tumbled into them, managed to get out—some of them floating bottom upwards, with men clinging to them and trying to right them—and the last few swimmers also got clear.

Silence fell once more upon that moonlit gulf—a silence broken only by the muffled shouting of the baffled, would-be invaders as they rallied beyond the Spur.

Tom Merritt was about to raise a shout of victory, when he and his companions were startled to hear the swift patter of naked feet outside their back door, which shook the next instant to a terrific blow, as if some mighty object had been hurled against it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE SURPRISERS BEATEN OFF

IN spite of their precaution at the bight, they were taken by surprise in the rear.

The pistol had gone off right enough—both chambers had been discharged in quick succession, by the savages who had got up at the spot tripping over the rope stretched around it. But with their own rapid firing and the frightful din in the inlet, the two distant reports had been drowned.

“Quick, Pottle, to a back loophole! Tom, you stay and watch the stairs.”

And Dick Selwyn flew to the back wall, which was loopholed the same as the front, in the event of just such an emergency as the present, little shutters having been contrived to clasp over the loops on the inside.

Dick, as he ran, changed his rifle to his left hand, and whipped forth one of his revolvers.

There came another loud, heavy thump upon the door—one not so loud or tremendous, however, as the first blow. Nevertheless, the door quivered under it; and another such knock would probably burst it in, or smash a panel.

Hurriedly unclasping one of the loop-shutters on the

right-hand side of the door, Dick, without waiting to look forth, thrust out the muzzle of his revolver, and, pointing it sideways, fired to the left, so as to shoot at a sharp angle across the threshold.

Then he swung the weapon to and fro, describing an arc with the muzzle, pressing the trigger rapidly—twice, three times, four times, five times.

At the same time, the British seaman fired out with his rifle through a loop on the left side of the door, swerving his piece to the right, thus delivering a cross-fire.

Dick's first shot had elicited a death-shriek just without; and, as his other shells pelted at various angles and Pottle chipped in, there was a heavy thud on the ground outside that shook the floor, and the frantic scutter of naked feet, intermingled with two or three more pain-wrung howls.

"Hold your fire, Pottle!" cried Dick. And he looked out.

He saw lying just outside in the mouth of the ravine the trunk of a tree, lopped of most of its branches, and two dark, huddled-up human shapes, one of which, the farther one, moved and tried to crawl away.

There was no sign of any other foes.

It was plain to the young American what had taken place. This second party of savages had hauled up the tree-trunk after them at the bight, and had used it as a battering-ram.

They had, no doubt, though, been immensely puzzled and disconcerted by the sudden silence that had supervened in the inlet—knew not what to make of it—and having run full tilt with the ram against the back door in the first instance, had then only just swung it where they stood.

It had but needed Dick Selwyn's rapid fire and the doom of one of their fellows to rout these very half-hearted new assailants, leaving their battering-ram behind them.

"We'll get their ram in, Pottle. They must have brought it with them: they had no time to cut down a tree here, and we'd have sure heard them. Tom, stand by here, to fire out and cover Pottle and me, if necessary. I'm going to open the door, to drag in a log they used as a ram. We've beaten the band off for the time being, but they will be still on the plateau. Be careful not to expose yourself more than you can help, Pottle."

Quickly he and the British seaman unbolted and unbarred the back door. Then with Tom Merritt watching through a loop and ready to fire at the first glimpse of a foe, they threw the door open, darted through and grabbed hold of the tree-trunk.

At his loop, Merritt could see the grove around the lake—and even part of the lake itself, shimmering brightly in the moonlight—with just one solitary tree standing about midway across the interven-

ing space. But he could see no lurking human figures.

Doubtless, all the attacking band had fled round the angle of rock, leaving the end of the ravine back towards the bight, or northward.

Retreating within the doorway with the head of the tree, Dick and Pottle then shifted their hands along it, from bough to bough, and thus hauled it in bodily without going outside again. Dick could not have dragged it in by himself, it was so heavy, but with the English sailor's great strength they effected their purpose easily enough.

As soon as its end cleared the threshold, they rolled it aside, and Dick slammed the door to again; and this was relocked, bolted, and barred as securely as before.

"Up the stairs with you now, Tom, and watch the sides of the roof as well as the back. Those fellows may be back again any minute, and may try to force an entry through the roof next. Pottle, to the front again, and guard the stairs. I'm going up with Merritt, to the loft, to see what the band on the plateau are up to. We can help you from the front loops if the inlet be invaded again."

The lower room had not been completely boarded over. Owing to all six windows being in the loft, two great gaps had been left in the flooring of this—one at either end—so as to light the living-room, and just a narrow gallery was under the front and rear loops.

Dick followed Merritt up the ladder into the loft, and

they peered out through the side loopholes on either hand, in quest of their lurking foes.

The whole plateau lay bathed in the silvery light of the moon, now almost at its zenith, and beautiful indeed the prospect looked, with the sea gleaming beyond the precipices that hemmed them round.

Looking first to the south side and at the Spur, Dick was well pleased to note that there were apparently no savages that way, unless some were lying, well concealed, in the long grass.

On looking through the north loops, he saw thirty or forty Papuans gathered about the bight on the east side, beyond the grove that lay between it and the ravine. The grove being very open permitted of his seeing the band quite plainly in the moonshine steeping everything.

All were gesticulating and calling down the cliff, evidently to the late invaders of the inlet who were below in their lakatois and surviving canoes. The band gave no sign of meaning to join their friends at the foot of the cliff.

"We'll have them back again presently, Tom," said Dick. "Why ever didn't we think of strewing the end of the ravine also with the tin-tacks. Ah, here they come. Stand to it, old pal! Rapid fire as soon as they issue from the trees. Let them come out into the open, and then put it into them. If they get close up, use your pistols for all you're worth. We must beat them back

at all costs. I shouldn't be surprised if we have the whole lot shortly attacking us from the bight—that the fellows below come up also by way of it and abandon further attacks on the stairway."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DICK'S LAST RESOURCE

THE savages came flitting swiftly through the trees, running for the most part like hares, and, contrary to their usual custom, without raising a shout. They rapidly extended or deployed to either side at the same time, plainly with the idea of enveloping Ravine House in a great semi-circle, if not of working round to the Spur also and so taking it on all sides.

As soon as they broke cover, Dick and Tom opened fire—shot as fast as possible, not troubling to take aim but blazing away as if their sole idea were to get rid of their ammunition. The pair knew that it would be almost impossible to pick off the swiftly running foemen in the uncertain light of the moon—a light difficult to shoot accurately by at the best of times—and that their only hope was to daunt the savages with a hot fire.

Their tactics succeeded. Although not a Papuan was hit, the whole line was quickly brought to a standstill by the ceaseless hail of bullets, and some of the more faint-hearted of the enemy even turned and fled back to shelter behind the trees.

The line of foemen now extended, however, from the goat pen on the southeast side to the central grove. Flinging themselves down in the tall grass, the warriors

everywhere contented themselves with replying to the defenders' fire by shooting their long war-arrows at the puffs of smoke issuing from the sloping side of the roof.

Thud! thud! thud! the missiles buried themselves in the sods of turf, penetrating in some cases to the inner planking, as it was afterwards learned.

"Keep moving from loop to loop, Tom," shouted Dick, "in case any of their shafts come through. They are not bad marksmen, remember."

"Do you want my help, gentlemen?" Pottle called up.

"Yes, you'd better come," Dick answered.

The British sailor came bounding up the ladder and joined in the fusilade, just as several meteor-like streaks of fire came speeding towards the roof from such of the assailants as had fled back amongst the trees.

These were now shooting fire-arrows—shafts with blazing pieces of matting or tow tied on behind the barbed heads.

Had the roof not been banked up with the sods of turf, it must have been quickly set alight, but as it was the fire-arrows, striking into these, only burned themselves out harmlessly, although serving in a measure to show up the loopholes.

As the three defenders, however, kept darting from one loop to another, although some of the war-arrows now came in at these, none of them received a scratch.

A wild, triumphant yell came up from the inlet.

Dick, who was nearest to the front wall, at once ran to the little gallery there, and looked down.

What he saw filled him with something like consternation. A long line of canoes, with high movable barricades upreared in their prows so as completely to screen their crews from sight, had come in the inlet, and was running rapidly alongside the landing-place.

Even as he looked down, the occupants of the leading canoe sprang ashore still holding up their high barricade to shield themselves, and from behind it began to brush the steps clear of the tin-tacks with mops made out of matting or their loin-cloths, tied in bundles on the butt-ends of their spears.

In next to no time they had swept the three lowermost stairs free of tacks and had mounted them, with their tall wooden or cane shield still upheld before them, and started clearing the next three steps. Their fellows in the other canoes, getting ashore or still coming in through the inlet-mouth, shot such clouds of war-arrows up at Ravine House that its front wall was soon bristling all over with the deadly six-foot long shafts.

None of the missiles, however, penetrated the fore-wall of the loft, thanks to its thick exterior banking of sods upon the ledge below the three windows, which of course were shuttered over.

Dick Selwyn thrust his rifle through the loop, and sent every shot he had left in the magazine of his rifle winging down the stairway at the savages' shield. The bullets thudded through it, striking down men behind, but as fast as those upholding it or using the mops fell, others dragged them back and took their

places; and step after step was steadily and quickly cleared of tacks and surmounted.

"Keep the band on the plateau at bay for your lives' sake, Pottle—Tom," the intrepid young American 'prentice shouted. "And Pottle, send a shot occasionally down the stair. I'm going to try our last resource—the bowlders. The fellows in the inlet have screens now, big moving barricades, and are sweeping the steps clear of the tin-tacks from behind them and coming up fast. They'll be at our front door soon if I don't stop them."

He dashed down the ladder. How fortunate it was that they had put up two, one at either end of the house, for greater convenience sake!

In his blind hurry he slipped on one of the rungs and fell, slightly hurting himself—bruising his left wrist. On his feet again in a moment, however, he sprang at the door and began undoing the fastenings upon it.

Working in feverish haste, he soon had the door free of all but the latch upon it. Then, leaving it shut, he seized upon a huge bowlder of rock—one of a great heap piled in the corner beside the door, and trundled it towards this.

After blocking the bottom-most step with fragments of rock, tied to his spring-gun, it had occurred to him that more great bowlders stored within the house would make most effective missiles at a pinch, if rolled down the stairway.

The time had certainly come for him to make use of them.

A most unnerving chorus of exultant yells was now welling up from the inlet. The savages in it were all yelling with joy at the success of their portable barricades and with anticipatory triumph and vengeance, as well as to encourage their friends on the plateau, who, although invisible to them, it was plain enough were keeping the defenders well engaged.

Opening the door just wide enough to permit of his thrusting forth the boulder without unduly exposing himself to the marksmen below, Dick worked the heavy piece of rock up the little steps inside, and on to the threshold, then gave it a push with all his strength towards the top stair.

Over this it went rolling. Then—crash—crash—crash! he heard it bounding swiftly down the step flight, while startled, affrighted screams took the place of the late triumphant shouting.

A louder and different kind of “crack,” and he knew that it had struck the enemy’s moving barricade; and with a thrill of excusable satisfaction he leaped to a loophole and looked down, leaving the door ajar in case he had to roll down more boulders.

He saw the barricade lying more or less flat upon the stairs, with a great hole torn in its middle, and several motionless or writhing savages half under it. Beyond, all down the stair and from end to end of the landing-place at the base, lay other mangled human forms,

dead or dying for the most part; and, just where the north wall of the inlet curved round to the mouth half a dozen objects like great Swedish turnips were bobbing about upon the water.

These last were, of course, the heads of swimmers.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A FRESH SURPRISE

THE boulder had gone from top to bottom of the steep stair, smashing clean as a roundshot through the frail barricade, killing or maiming the Papuans upholding this or using the brooms, and, continuing on its downward career, had plowed a passage right through the dense column of foemen pressing up the steps, to plump finally into a canoe at the extremity of the landing-place.

Awful was the carnage wrought; and awful too were now the howls of dismay and rage that floated up to the ears of the young American.

But it was no time to have pity or show mercy. The band below must be routed again—sent fleeing once more in a panic—or the one on the plateau might reach the roof or back door and force a way in.

Dick Selwyn, therefore, turned and, gripping another huge fragment of rock trundled it out the doorway, and, boldly exposing himself this time as the upward hail of arrows had ceased, sent it rolling after its fellow down the stairs.

This second boulder did not go right to the bottom: it left the stairway about half-way down, in a mighty bound that carried it against the precipice or Spur on

the southern side. It burst with the impact into a hundred splinters, which rained down like those of a bomb upon the devoted heads of the terrified Papuans.

That was enough for the boldest amongst them. Once more in a mad panic all within the inlet strove to escape from it, and the same scenes were enacted as before—men scrambling off the landing-place into the canoes alongside in such numbers and so heedlessly as to upset most of these, and be spilled into the water; other warriors diving and swimming away under the surface; and others again clambering over the heads and shoulders of those in the nearer boats to reach the farther ones.

Dick Selwyn reclosed and relocked the door. But he did not wait to bolt and bar it again, satisfied no one would attempt to come up the stair and anxious as to how his companions were faring.

Judging from the rapid fire they were keeping up, the band on the plateau were pressing the attack vigorously once more, trying desperately to get to the back door or the roof. Both his fellow-defenders had taken to their revolvers, he could tell from the sound of the reports; and so he felt surer that they must be hard beset.

Moreover, Pottle had not fired a single shot into the inlet, to help increase the panic and stampede there.

Catching up their two spare rifles—he had his own slung upon his left shoulder—Dick went springing up the fore ladder into the loft again, and saw Tom Merritt

and the English seaman, each with a revolver in either hand, standing close together at loops on the northern side, firing out as fast as they could press trigger.

He leaped to a loop beside Pottle, and, looking forth, saw a long line of savages rushing straight for the side of the house like a pack of hounds in full cry. The line extended from the far end of the goat pen to two outstanding trees of the grove around the lake, the assailants on the right hand, those next the pen, being slightly the nearer.

Here and there behind the on-rushing line lay about half a dozen still or squirming human forms, showing that all Tom's and Pottle's shots had not been thrown away.

"Quick, use this, Pottle!" And Dick held out one of the spare rifles to the sailor, then thrust forth the other and opened a brisk fire upon the nearer end of the line, never waiting to unsling the third weapon from his left shoulder.

The sudden increase in strength of the little garrison told. Moreover, Dick's shots were less wild and flurried than his companions'—flew straighter. Two men crumpled up in their strides, pitched upon their heads, and lay still from his first three shots.

With yells of dismay and baffled fury the advancing line there wavered, halted, turned, and fled back, and on that the other wing also came to a stand, wheeled about, and ran for shelter in amongst the trees around the lake.

"Heaven be praised!" panted Tom Merritt. "They'd have been alongside in another moment, when the sods and weather-boarding wouldn't have withstood them long. For that matter, they might have dropped down before both doors—taken us front and rear, as well as in flank."

"You settled the chief who was leading 'em on, with your very fust shot, Mr. Selwyn," said Pottle, "and that did the trick. I tried to hit him more'n once, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, as they say, until you come on the scene."

"The band in the inlet has fled in a panic again, also," Dick informed his companions. "Two of the bowlders were enough to work the oracle. They served their purpose well. But I feel deeply grieved at the awful slaughter we've had to commit one way and another—the number of lives we've taken. It was their lives or ours, though, and self-preservation is the first law of nature."

"I should say so," growled Pottle. "Their lives lie light on my conscience. I've no wish to be killed and ate, nor yet made prisoner and tortured, neither."

"Reckon we've only got these fellows on the plateau now to fear," remarked Dick. "I'll see what they're doing on the west side. That's our most vulnerable side now: they may be able to set the back door or window shutter there on fire with their fire-arrows. Pottle, you watch this lot to the northeast. Tom, you give an eye

to the inlet and be ready to lend Pottle a hand, if necessary."

He was running to the rear gallery when Tom Merritt, peeping through a front loop, uttered a startled shout, thrust out a rifle, and fired sharply.

"Missed him!" he yelled. "There's a wounded man got up the stairs—a big chief, with an ax. Ah!" as thundering blows resounded upon the front door, "he may break in; I'll have to open a shutter and lean out."

"I'll deal with him," roared Pottle. "You guard the side here, Mr. Merritt."

CHAPTER XL

FLIGHT OF THE SAVAGES

THE blows of the ax, wielded by no weak arm, not only filled Ravine House with their noise but were echoed, and thus multiplied apparently in number as well as augmented in volume, by the rocky walls of the inlet and the groves of trees on the plateau.

And ever as he dealt his strokes now, the Papuan champion gave vent to stentorian shouts of "Parooka! Parooka! Ulaloo! ulaloo!"

His shouting had a surprisingly inspiring effect upon all the savages on the plateau. As with one accord, both bands simultaneously broke cover, reiterating jubilantly: "Parooka! Parooka! Ulaloo! ulaloo!" and came swarming forward once more to a combined onslaught on the house.

Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt subsequently learned that Parooka was the gallant champion's name, and one to conjure with amongst his people as that of the most redoubtable and popular chief in the whole tribe. The word "ulaloo" was a rallying cry or war-shout of on-fall.

Both American lads at once, in wild alarm, potted away for dear life again, and the British seaman in frantic haste undid one of the window-shutters in the

front of the house. Opening it, he leaned half out the window with pointed revolver.

Cra-ash! one of the thick panels of the front door had given way under the mighty strokes of Parooka's tomahawk.

Crack! crack! rang out Pottle's revolver immediately; but Dick Selwyn's brave heart the next instant turned sick and faint within him at a wild broken cry of mingled horror and grief in Tom Merritt's voice.

He whirled round—to behold in speechless sorrow and despair Pottle fallen back in a reclining posture against the front wall beside the open window, with a Papuan tomahawk cleaving open his forehead between the eyes and the blood pouring down his face in torrents.

With both of the English sailor's bullets through him, Parooka, ere he fell dead in his tracks, had sufficient strength left to hurl his ax at his slayer's face, and his aim had proved too true.

Pottle could never have breathed after the ax-blade struck him, for it had sunk deep through bone and sinew into the brain.

Dick Selwyn groaned aloud as if he himself had received a mortal wound. Then, with the instinct of self-preservation, he swung round again to fire once more upon the up-racing foe.

Crack! crack! crack! his rifle pealed forth in rapid succession, and a man fell and rolled over with a shriek.

And then a great, dazzling effulgence that paled the

moonshine—that turned this as it were to water—shot athwart his vision from seaward and rested in an ever-broadening beam across the plateau, from end to end.

It showed up all the on-coming savages and the trees lying in its track, as brightly as the sun would have done.

Stumbling like drunken men, every one of the Papuan warriors before Dick Selwyn came to an immediate halt. Then, throwing up their hands and screeching affrightedly, they all wheeled towards the north and fled like beings possessed.

Boom! Boom!

Two cannon-shots rent the air, rattling the windows and doors of Ravine House and, if anything, lending wings to the terror-stricken Papuans, both bands of which were now racing like mad for the bight.

“Hurrah, Tom! We are saved! A warship’s searchlight and guns! But quick, see to Pottle. Is he alive?”

When the searchlight fell athwart the plateau, fully half the assailants at Dick Selwyn’s end of the house had got past the lone tree and were within less than twenty feet of the back door, while on Tom Merritt’s side some of the savages had reached the goat-pen and were actually skirting the precipice overhanging the landing-place and stairway, so that he could only have shot at them by changing his position to the front of the house.

Fully a dozen of their arrows—though none was a

fire-shaft—had come in through the window Pottle had opened. But, shot at an angle, all had only harmlessly struck the southern inner slope of the roof.

The warship had come on the scene in the nick of time for the two young surviving defenders.

Paying no further heed to their late foes, Dick Selwyn ran towards the front gallery, where Tom Merritt was already bending over the English sailor.

"He is dead, Dick. The ax is buried in his brain. But he has settled the chief outside; so we have nothing further to fear."

Dick made certain that Pottle was a corpse, and then, laying the body down gently upon the gallery floor, reverently closed the dead man's staring eyes, and straightened and composed the nerveless limbs.

"Reckon he deserved a better fate. He proved himself a true friend to you and me at any rate, Tom," said Dick sorrowfully. "But perhaps it is all for the best. He'd have had to stand his trial, had he lived, for the murders of Captain Somers and Mr. Drew, and he'd have been bound to get time, if he escaped the electric chair. Come now, we'll go out on to the Spur, and try and prevent the warship sailing off and leaving us. Who knows but her captain may conclude it was only some fracas of intertribal row between the natives. He may never dream that white men were mixed up in it and in peril of their lives on this wild rock."

Losing no further time, the two lads went down the ladder, hurried out the back and ran to the southern

cliffs, midway between the Spur and the chain of rocks on which the *Albatross* was wrecked.

Away in the offing they could see the searchlight, which still kept playing over the plateau, tapering to a glowing incandescent ball, with below, the dark outline of a powerful naval cruiser.

The boys at once began capering about, shouting for all they were worth and firing off their revolvers. And presently the searchlight swerved a little and focused itself fully upon them, blinding them with its glare.

But they were satisfied from that swerve that they were seen, and their hearts lightened still more.

They remained where they were, bawling themselves hoarse and waving their waistcoats. Both had doffed their jackets before the battle.

At length, to their extreme joy, they saw three tiny specks making for them across the ocean from the warship. The specks swiftly drew nearer and revealed themselves as steam-pinnaces, and the throbbing of their engines floated across the water.

Speedily the three craft were close enough for the boys to recognize the glorious old Stars and Stripes flying at their prows, and that the officers and seamen in them wore the United States naval uniform.

"Hurrah! hurrah! They're Americans," yelled Dick, delightedly.

CHAPTER XLI

DELIVERANCE!

"WHO are you? And what was the row?" hailed a lieutenant, as the boats came under the cliff.

"We are shipwrecked American sailors—castaways—two apprentices, the only survivors of the Boston trading schooner *Albatross*, bound from Manila to San Francisco and wrecked here some weeks ago on those rocks you see to your left. We were attacked by natives from the Papuan mainland, and have had the fight of our lives. A sailor who was cast away with us has been killed. You shone the searchlight on the rock just in time to save the situation," Dick shouted back, with his hands held trumpet-wise around his mouth.

"But however did you get up there? I always understood that this rock, was unclimbable."

"You see that inlet to the right? You can get up easily enough inside it. The natives, who use the top of the island to rear pigs and goats, have cut a stairway up."

Without more ado, the pinnacles made for the inlet, and Dick and Tom ran back to Ravine House, passed through it, and, opening the front door, went out on to the platform of rock at the tops of the stairs.

They saw that the dead Papuan champion, Parooka,

had his left arm broken in two places—doubtless through being struck by the first boulder that Dick had rolled down the stairway.

Both lads were awed by the hardihood and pluck the man had displayed in mounting the rest of the steps after receiving such an injury, and when all his supporters had fled, to wage lone battle with them.

He had matting bound round his feet, clearly to protest them against the tin-tacks; and it was found later that most of the warriors who had led the last onset upon the stairs, and borne the portable screen, had adopted a similar precaution.

Their intention, it was pretty plain, was to discard the shield, when they had got close up to the house, and make a sudden rush for this.

It was the lieutenant in charge of the pinnaces who afterwards recognized the chief as Parooka, with whom he had once had some previous trouble to arrange.

Descending the stairs, the boys were almost sick with horror at the carnage the boulder had inflicted. But to their infinite relief none of the Papuans lying on the stairs was alive. Otherwise they would have been in grave peril still—of being speared, knifed, or tomahawked.

As it was, they reached the landing-place in safety, and in time to greet the pinnaces.

“My heaven! But there’s been some slaughter here,” gasped the lieutenant, as he looked up the stairway.

"Do you mean to tell me that there were only three of you holding the place?"

Dick told him how the slaughter had been effected. And then, catching sight of Ravine House for the first time, the lieutenant again exclaimed in astonishment, and congratulated the lads on their happy idea of building their dwelling where and in the manner they had done.

"It was my chum's idea," said Tom Merritt. "In fact everything that we did, pretty much, was at his suggestion."

"You are a young fellow of parts, that's evident," said the lieutenant, and he shook hands again, admiringly, with Dick.

The island, the lieutenant told the boys, as they went up the stairway, was known as Tower Rock, and had never before been explored or climbed by white men, so far as he knew. He lavished praises on the ingenious way they had fortified Ravine House, and agreed with them that perhaps it was as well for the British seaman to have died as he had done, all things considered.

For of course Dick and Tom had told him, while they were ascending the stair, of the mutiny, as well as something of their amazing experiences on the other New Guinea island.

Both lads, however, refrained from mentioning anything about the treasure until they were in the house. Then Dick said:

"We have something very important to show you, sir.

The reason of the mutiny, I must tell you, was that Carker, the second mate, and most of the crew wanted to go on a treasure-hunting expedition. And—and the treasure was found on the other island, and is here. We have it inside this cupboard—at least a goodly portion, the greater bulk of it.”

And unlocking the strong-room door he showed the amazed lieutenant the bags and sacks of treasure.

They did not remain longer than was necessary on the island. One of the pinnaces was at once sent back to the cruiser, which was the *James Garfield*, to acquaint her commander with everything; and he came ashore himself to see Ravine House and the treasure.

By his orders, Pottle was buried at the foot of the lone tree opposite the back wall of Ravine House, he himself reading the funeral service over the grave. Dick and Tom wept bitterly beside it, and their tears were no disgrace to them.

The dead man had, in a measure, atoned for his past misdeeds by the loyal way he had stood by them, and helped them, after the wreck and on that desert rocky stack, so fitly named Tower Rock, and they would have been heartless indeed had they not remembered his late services with gratitude and mourned at his sad end, although this might have been a worse one, one of deepest ignominy, had he lived.

The slain Papuans were all interred in a big pit dug opposite the bight.

It was a marvel to Dick Selwyn and Tom Merritt,

for long after, that no wounded natives were found. But the powers of endurance possessed by savages is truly amazing, and all but those on the point of dying had either managed to get away down the bight with the aid or in the wake of their able-bodied fellows, or had thrown themselves off the stairway and swum out of the inlet.

Ravine House was left standing, with what provisions and furniture it contained, for the benefit either of such natives as might again visit the rock or any other castaways who might be thrown upon it. But of course all the arms and ammunition were taken with the treasure and the boys aboard the warship.

The pigs and goats, too, were left undisturbed. The animals were all found by the bluejackets who roved over the plateau, hiding in the grove at the north-western extremity, nearly frightened to death, every one of them, by the din of battle that had so startlingly broken the even tenor of their lives.

Dick and Tom were lionized on the cruiser by both officers and men for the plucky fight they had put up against the savages; but that lionizing was as nothing to what they received when they landed in Manila. The whole American colony strove its utmost to do the two lads honor.

And a full account of their thrilling adventures from first to last was of course cabled home to the United States, so that the old homeland also rang with their

praises. They were looked upon as heroes, and their portraits, as well as photographs of Tower Rock, the stairway, Ravine House, and the plateau, which had been taken by one of the officers of the *James Garfield*, appeared in all the papers.

To the great relief of both lads, however, for they were modest young fellows, the excitement or interest had somewhat subsided when they reached San Francisco, and they were able to escape further unwelcome attention. Relations met them at San Francisco, and they returned to their homes in Boston with no public notice and no public demonstration. However, friends in private made up for the seeming indifference of the home town. Social receptions were given in their honor, and being stalwart young fellows, they became welcome in exclusive social sets that they had never dreamed of entering before. But their heads were not turned either by social honors or the prospect of wealth.

The rightful owners of the treasure had already been advertised for, and had come forward to claim it. After a great deal of litigation and delay, the courts eventually allowed the two lads such salvage in respect of the restored wealth as made them both rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Neither of them, however, has the slightest desire to see Tower Rock or New Guinea again, and still shudder when they think of some of the awful experiences they went through on the two islands. Others might

regard their adventures as a happy holiday, because they came out alive, but never again for them. They entered the business of living with the same level-headed zeal with which they had met the challenges to their lives, and we may be sure, with no less success.

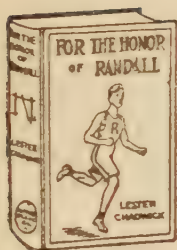
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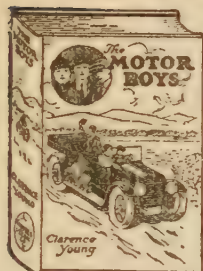
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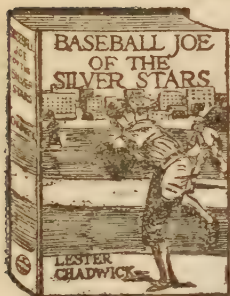
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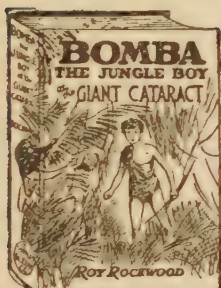
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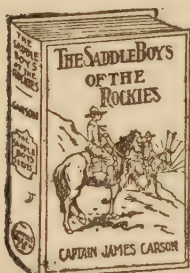
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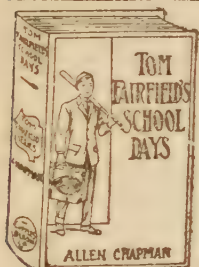
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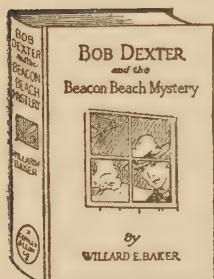
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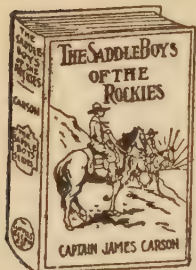
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